

#JUNGFRAU

Swiss playground

Family travel in Switzerland allows parents the best of both guided and DIY experiences. *By Sue White*

T

RAMPING ALONG THE GRAVEL TRACK, it doesn't take long to see it: wood, ropes, pulleys and two large piles of pinecones. My five-year-old son Ollie spots it too and, instantly recovering from his refrain of "I don't want to walk", runs ahead in excitement towards the wooden fort.

We've just set out along the Muggestutz adventure trail, a four-kilometre mountain hike themed around the legendary dwarves of the family-friendly Haslital Valley, far above the mountain town of Meiringen in Switzerland's Jungfrau region.

Disembarking the gondola at Mägisalp, we wind our way along the mountain path. Eyeing the views of the Eiger mountain and its snow-coloured siblings in the distance, the wildflower-lined trail reminds me just how good the Swiss are at taking 'family friendly' options to the next level.

Muggestutz is dotted with play areas, so every few hundred metres is a cubby house, a ladder heading up a tree (one leads to an 'eagle's' nest filled with treasures), a marble run perfect for rolling the walnut provided with our gondola ticket, or of course the fort where we spend a pleasant 20 minutes delivering pinecones up and down using a basket and pulley system.





Still, the best part comes after each play break. “Mum, let’s go to find the next one,” chirps Ollie. The Swiss may be famous for watches, fondue and chocolate, but creating a trail that encourages kids to hike? That’s pure genius.

Today we need the extra support. Ollie’s still recovering from yesterday’s Swiss hiking success: further along this same valley he happily hiked from the funicular station at the top of Meiringen’s Reichenbach Falls for, wait for it, two and a half hours, making it all the way to the captivating 200-metre deep Aare Gorge. He then trotted merrily along its 1.4 kilometre length. By the end of the day, I was spent. Ollie? An hour’s play at the excellent playground at the Gorge’s west entrance proved non-negotiable.

These are miracles I partly chalk up to the ease of family travel in Switzerland. The basics of getting around are so smooth it’s easy to do it all yourself without a guide. Travellers soon learn if travelling a route requiring a bus, two trains and a ferry, that not only will each arrive and depart on time, but there will be sensible, straightforward connections between each form of transport.

For a family that means a rewarding holiday can be had by mixing and matching short kid-length guided activities (say



The Swiss may be famous for watches, fondue and chocolate – but creating a trail that encourages kids to hike? That’s pure genius.

two to three hours) with self-guided options such as our Aare Gorge hike. Another self-guided equivalent further along the mountain range is the train and wildflower combination to Schynige Platte. Here, parents can relax over lunch with Alps views while kids play in the excellent new wooden playground.

Of course, guided activities are sometimes worth making an effort for. A few days later in the unmissable mountain town of Grindelwald I struggle to get my son out the door to meet a 7.40am bus. I blame what is surely one of the world’s most scenic playgrounds for my troubles. The complex ropes course in the middle of Grindelwald, overlooked by the Eiger mountain, had us both captivated until late last night, albeit for different reasons.

We make the bus by five minutes



OPENING IMAGE: The writer’s son Ollie enjoying the mountain walks.
 OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: A cow on a hiking path through Schynige Platte; Jungfrau’s beautiful scenery.
 THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: On the Aare Gorge hike; breakfast at an alpine cheese farm above Bussalp.
 FOLLOWING PAGE: Writer Sue White and son kayaking on Lake Brienz.



and head further up into the Alps for breakfast at a small cheese maker's farm. Each July and August Jungfrau Tourism coordinates the weekly opportunity for visitors to watch a summer-only tradition: a three-hour organised activity that is perfect for all ages.

Reluctantly peeling my eyes away from the view, I step into the barn to watch the second-generation cheese farmer ply his craft while his cows hover outside on the hillside, bells ringing melodically.

"He does it for love, culture and history," the farmer's sidekick confirms, as farmer Andreas carefully stirs then slices a large cauldron full of curds and whey.

The thick, unpasteurised milk we are offered evokes a firm "yuk" from Ollie, but I like the warm mixture. However, as we settle outside around a wooden table to dine on fresh bread, jam and of course cheese, breakfast gets the thumbs up. We walk it off by heading together down the mountain trail to the bus stop. It's a 40-minute jaunt that, thanks to a week of Swiss hiking, doesn't evoke one protest.

While the Swiss have figured out how to entice kids to walk, I've always known what would motivate my own child on our Swiss travels – cooking sweet food. We start off slowly, learning how to make meringues in the town famous where they

were invented (Meiringen, according to the Swiss). But it's a half hour train ride away in Interlaken where I share news of my trump card – chocolate making.

Ollie is the only child in today's 75-minute class but it's an all ages activity. The chocolatier from Funky Chocolate Club teaches us the different strengths of chocolate and shows us how to create and decorate our own bars to take home, all the while encouraging us to taste test until we burst.

Over the coming days, I attempt to paddle off some of the calories on the dazzling green waters of nearby Lake Brienz (water pistol fights with our guide keep my son entertained from the front of my kayak). We don thermals for a viewing of the Jungfrauoch glacier and inch our way along the ice palace beneath it. Near Interlaken again, we guide a local farmer's llamas through the woods on a unique two-hour stroll. And on our only wet day we retreat to the fairytale town of Thun, where a game of 'detective' in the 12th century castle has Ollie scouring old tapestries for clues and enjoying real-life stories of partying knights and condemned prisoners.

Eventually, it's time to leave Switzerland's mountains behind. Ready to head for the train, I click open the pram. "That's okay," Ollie says. "I'll walk." 🐾



TRAVEL FACTS

GETTING THERE

Many major airlines fly to Zurich, Switzerland including Qantas, Etihad and Singapore Airlines. From there it's about 2 hours 20 minutes to Interlaken where trains depart regularly for both Meiringen and Grindelwald (about 45 minutes each). Consider buying a Swiss Travel Pass as this can significantly cut your transport costs. Day passes like the Supersaver also include most of the bus, train or boat trips you'll want to do.

myswitzerland.com/rail

STAYING THERE

Hotel Rebstock, Meiringen
hotel-rebstock.ch
Hotel Alpina, Grindelwald
alpina-grindelwald.ch
City Hotel Oberland, Interlaken
city-oberland.ch/

EXPLORING

myswitzerland.com

interlaken.ch

jungfrau.ch

meiringen-hasliberg.ch

ACTIVITIES

Aare Gorge

aaeschlucht.ch

Reichenbach Falls

grimselwelt.ch/ausflugstipps/reichenbachfall

Llama trekking

lamatrek-jungfrauregion.ch

Funky Chocolate Club

funkychocolateclub.com

Kayaking Lake Brienz

hightide.ch

Thun Castle

schlossthun.ch

Cheese farm visit (organised by Grindelwald tourism)

grindelwald.swiss

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#VIETNAM
Cultural
connections in
Vietnam

Puppetry and rice paddies: Hoi An is the perfect destination for a cultural family holiday. *By Sue White*



T

HERE ARE DOZENS OF REASONS to love Hoi An, but for families the historic town's versatility is undeniably appealing. Not only is Hoi An visually beautiful, but it wraps the best of Vietnam's coastline and culture into one easy holiday destination. Stay in one of the beach resorts around An Bang, just five kilometres from Hoi-An's UNESCO protected old town, and when you're not relaxing poolside dip into Hoi An's excellent cultural offerings.

1 } CYCLE THE ISLANDS

Hoi An is excellent for cycling. Outside peak hour the streets aren't busy and the whole area is flat. Bike tours abound, but the best cultural experiences here come when cycling with only a vague commitment to your final destination. Cross one of the many bridges to Cam Kim, Thuan Tinh or any of the other neighbouring islands for quiet streets, rural houses (often with piglets or chickens running through) and a chance to watch locals at work on tasks like boat building on the edge of the Thu Bôn river.

Most hotels have free bicycles for guests, and will provide a child seat for toddlers. Older children can ride their own bike or prop on the back carrier of yours. Head out before the heat hits, returning home for a lazy buffet breakfast and dip in your hotel pool. Packing tip: Take a bike helmet from home; they're not used here.

OPPOSITE PAGE: In Hoi An, families will see locals going about their work in green fields. RIGHT: Cycling is the best way to get around the ancient and colourful UNESCO town.

2 } WATCH WATER PUPPETS

Many countries have a culture of puppetry, but Vietnam's puppet shows take place on water. Held at 6.30pm each Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, Hoi An's interpretation of this thousand-year-old cultural tradition is a visual delight that will impress two to 82-year-olds.

The outdoor undercover auditorium fills quickly so come early with takeaway dinner in hand (buy food near your hotel – there's little nearby).

It's hard to follow the ancient fables in the plotline but that doesn't matter: the 45-minute show (A\$6) is filled with short vignettes of everything from fish to fire breathing dragons, all controlled by puppeteers standing waist high in water behind the scenes.

Afterwards, follow the crowds – Hoi An's taxis don't cruise the streets, so it's better to walk somewhere busier and get restaurant staff to order you a taxi home. Remember; carry your hotel's business card to help drivers with minimal English.

3 } WANDER THE RICE PADDIES

Cycle almost any direction from Hoi An's centre and you'll soon pass a bright green rice paddy. True, these are disappearing fast thanks to construction for new hotels, but dozens are still dotted around Hoi An's fringes.

Tours exist but you don't need one. Instead, leave your bike and wander on foot through the narrow dirt tracks, waving to the farmers hard at work. Most speak no English but are usually delighted with an approach. Your child will be your entry ticket to lots of smiling and pointing as you try to understand the cultivation process despite language barriers.

4 } MEANDER THROUGH MARKETS

Hoi An's spectacular old town deserves its popularity, but for a cultural experience packed with locals rather than tourists, get up early (6.30am) and head to the morning Central Market along the Thu Bôn river's edge. Stock up on lychees and dragon fruit, perfect for feeding the kids on the cycle home.

5 } VISIT MY SON

For an easy daytrip with a cultural pay off, rent a car and driver and spend a morning at My Son. An hour's drive from Hoi An, this ancient Cham temple complex offers kids a couple of hours exploring and climbing. Take snacks for a picnic in the lush jungle valley site – although there is a small café near the entrance, it's a longish walk. Arrive for the 6.30am opening and you'll be leaving when the tour groups descend. ☹



#FAMILYBALI

Bali high

Step away from the pool bar: these family-friendly Bali adventures will keep the whole family happy.

By Sue White



B

ALI'S FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESORTS can make it so easy to 'flop and drop' that it's often hard to pull yourself away from the jam-packed activity schedule, kids' clubs or, while said kids are occupied, pool bar. But there are plenty of ways to ensure your family's Bali holiday memories extend beyond buffets and beach chairs.

ADVENTURE 1 } HIT THE SURF

If the kids are keen to get active above the waves, Bali can be an excellent spot to learn to surf. Lessons for beginners are run at locations such as Legian, Sanur, Kuta and Seminyak, and there are plenty of operators to choose from. Most will require kids to do a private or semi-private class, although if the adults are keen too it's a great chance to book a family lesson and learn together.

ADVENTURE 2 } SNORKEL WITH MANTAS

Swimming alongside a huge but harmless manta ray will send a thrill of excitement through snorkellers of any age. In Bali they are found in the waters of Nusa Lembongan, an island 30 minutes off the coast of Sanur.

Many visitors head over to Lembongan for a snorkelling day trip, ready to enjoy Lembongan's clear waters and marine life.

Operators like Lembongan Water Sports can collect families from any of Bali's major tourist hotspots and whip them across to Lembongan for this water-filled day out.

Day-trippers usually visit three snorkelling spots, one of which is home to the manta rays – lucky snorkellers bob in the sea with up to a dozen of the four-metre-plus creatures. To up the adventure stakes, stay on Nusa Lembongan for a few nights; that way you'll also have time to kayak the mangroves or laze in the pool at Sandy Bay Beach Club one afternoon while watching the waves break nearby.

Just one word of caution: the water where the mantas hang out is often choppy, so ensure young snorkellers are ready for the experience.

**ADVENTURE 3 }
TAKE THE FAMILY CAMPING**
Next door to the architecturally impressive Green School Bali lies Green Camp. Here, families can sign up for the physical, emotional and intellectual challenges that come with taking on a jungle adventure.

Green Camp's Family Camps run for three or five days, allowing up to 12 families at a

time to connect to each other and nature. Suitable for children aged five and over, the camps help family members cultivate survival skills, develop sustainability know-how and take part in activities such as bamboo raft building, kite making, organic gardening and laughing yoga.

It's not all jungle play: Green Camp also provides a chance for parents and their children to experience the philosophy of Green School Bali and learn about various aspects of Balinese culture.

**ADVENTURE 4 }
GET ON YOUR BIKE**

The hills outside Ubud offer plenty of scope for families who like two-wheeled adventures. That's just one reason why a day of cycling often becomes the number-one Balinese experience for many families.

Get an early start with a company such as Greenbike, and after a quick eyeball of the active volcano Mount Batur (its last serious eruption was in the year 2000) head off to explore Bali's backroads for the day.

Young children will ride in comfort on the provided child seats, while guides cycle at the front and back of each small group to divert



OPENING IMAGE: Kids can't wait to join surf school at various locations in Bali. **CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** A manta ray is just waiting for snorkellers to visit; Cyclists get to ride past lush rice terraces in Ubud; It's a jungle out there at Green Camp; The writer's son Ollie takes on a cooking workshop in Sarinbuana.

any traffic on the country roads. As you ride through forests, pedal by rice paddies and zoom past villages, the slightly unfit need not worry: the whole trip is downhill.

A tip for those with young kids: see if you can organise a trip that skips the first stop (a coffee tutorial). It's reasonably interesting but won't hold children's attention long enough to warrant the stop.

**ADVENTURE 5 }
CULTURAL EXPLORATIONS**

Not all adventures are for the body; many are for the mind. The place to do it? Sarinbuana Eco Lodge. Tucked in the mountains about two hours from Seminyak or Ubud, this is an authentic, well-run lodge with strong connections to its local community. For the body, local guides offer rainforest hikes taking as little as three hours; primary schoolers will cope nicely with the pace. Younger children will need

help, so take a carrier or be prepared to offer some shoulder rides. It's also satisfying to wander solo around the property exploring treasures such as Sarinbuana's small waterhole and its secret jungle swing, where kids can soar above the jungle's edge.

Back at Sarinbuana proper, workshops abound so that young and old can soak up Balinese culture during their stay. Four-year-olds will love making a limestone carving under the guidance of a local carver; costume fans can try on traditional dresses; and young chefs can chop, grind and pour their way through cooking classes in the restaurant's small kitchen. (Grinding chilli often provides some extra adventure: goggles may help!)

Visitors will get to know the other guests and the staff, the latter of who are all from the local village. Each stay at Sarinbuana supports over 25 locals who receive well-paid jobs and skills training from the owners of this sustainable property. ♻️

📍 TRAVEL FACTS

GET YOUR ADVENTURE ON

Lembongan Water Sports
lembonganwatersport.com
Green Camp
greencampbali.com
Green Bike Cycling Tour
greenbiketour.com
Sarinbuana Eco Lodge
baliecolodge.com

SURF OPERATORS

Surf School Bali – Seminyak
surfschoolbali.com
Rip Curl School of Surf – Sanur and Legian
ripcurlschoolsofsurf.com
Odyssey's Surf School
odysseysurfschool.com



Have tribe, will travel

Multi-generational trips are on the rise among families, as is taking friends along for the ride

WORDS SUE WHITE

Like many of us, my mental image of the perfect family holiday usually includes beaches, culture or beautiful bushland. But, until recently, I'd never considered adding a wheelbarrow to that list.

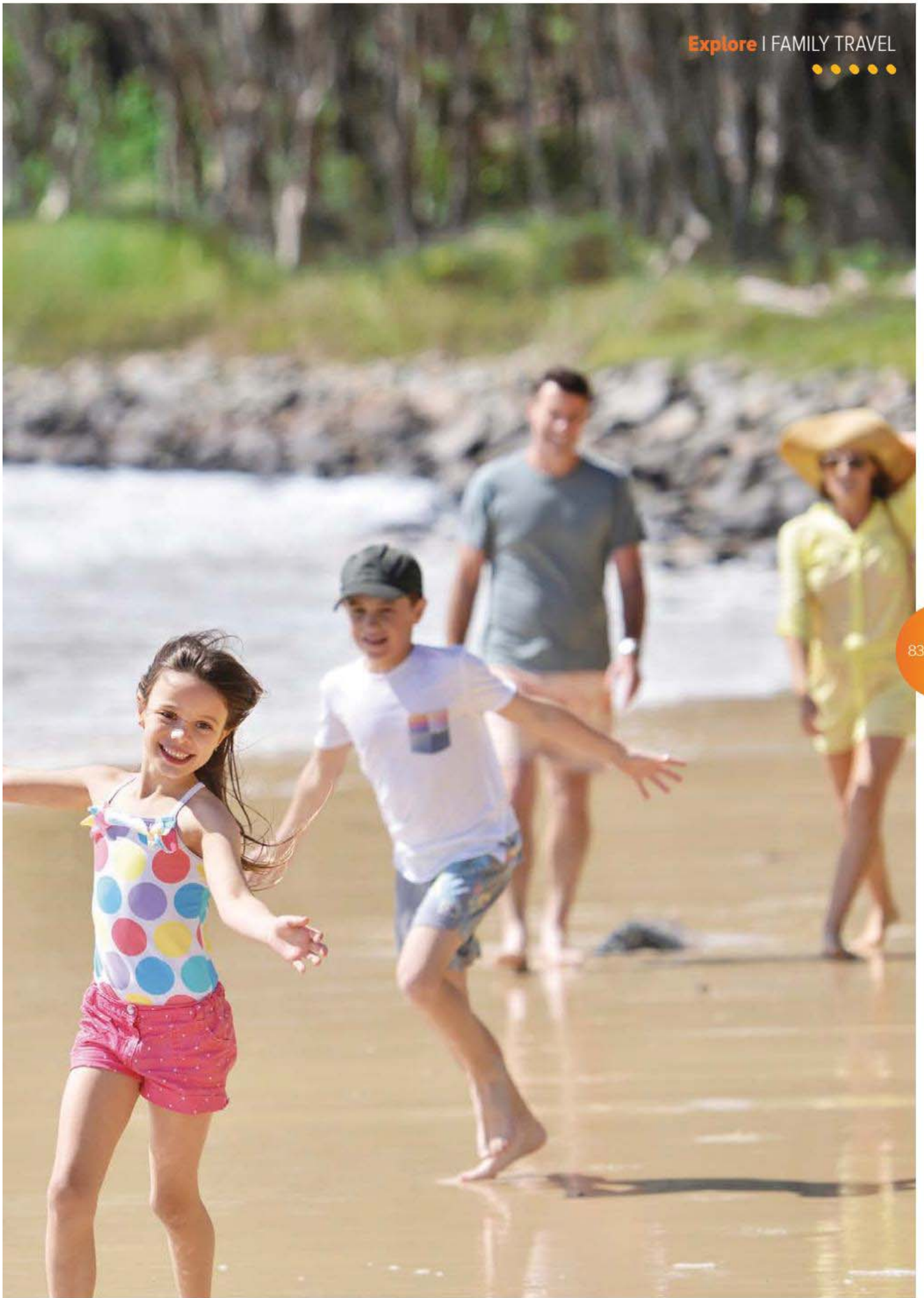
Yet there I was, huffing and puffing my way up a steep dirt track on the edge of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park in Sydney, watching my two-year-old chatter happily from his position on top of a wheelbarrow full of bags.

Even better: I wasn't the one doing the pushing. That kudos went to a friend who, channelling his inner superhero, did laps with the wheelbarrow while I shared luggage-dragging duty with the other adults.

Our group of seven families and one brave single had booked the entire Pittwater YHA for three nights. I'd visited with the same girlfriends in our 20s, but today partners and kids were in tow – 25 of us in total.

We'd divvied up the rooms and created a roster, which meant each family needed only to cook and wash up once, leaving the bulk of our time to be fed, wine and dined with some of our oldest friends.

The wild success of our experiment was in part due to, not in spite of, the size of our tribe. The kids played endlessly; the adults had hours to socialise, relax or soak up the setting; and there was no pressing schedule other than deciding if we could be bothered heading back down »





the hill for a kayak. “The most relaxing trip we’ve had since our honeymoon,” one couple declared more than once.

We’re not the only families to have thought of travelling with friends. Families have been camping together since someone figured out that ‘built-in playmates’ usually equals ‘relaxed parents’. But today’s families are upping the ante: they might rent a house together, book a campsite or head overseas for a milestone birthday.

If friends aren’t available, the grandparents often are. Multi-generational trips are trending within the travel industry: according to a recent study by finder.com.au, one third of parents often take a member of the extended family on holiday.

A home away

Renting a holiday house is popular among large groups of family or friends. Even researchers have noticed the shift. When University of Tasmania’s Dr Louise Grimmer ran a small pilot study on locals using Airbnb, she noticed a growing segment she labelled ‘socialisers’, which included friendship groups travelling together.

It’s a good description of Kim Fitzpatrick. She recently spent a long weekend on the Sunshine Coast with not one but three other families as a ‘tester’ to see if they were all on the same page before heading off for a longer trip. Their Airbnb rental included eight adults, three toddlers and a preschooler. While it was a hit, and those longer trips are in the works, she learned a lot.

“We had our own separate family times out of the house, and planned and cooked meals in advance to share the load. We looked out for each others’ kids, and then enjoyed a few drinks and board



CLOCKWISE: An Airbnb pad in Japan, Vivienne Pearson’s mob at the beach, on tour with Intrepid Travel.



services like Airbnb make it easier for multi-generational groups

games together when the kids were asleep,” she says.

Kim suggests not skimping on spaces, and thinking about your travelling companions’ parenting style in advance. “[We found that] our group parents in a similar fashion [to one another], but it may put a strain on the group if, for example, one set uses gentle parenting and another a more authoritarian style,” she says.

Louise acknowledges groups like Kim’s could easily have rented holiday houses together in the past but says services like Airbnb make it easier for multi-generational groups. “Research shows grandparents – and grandmothers in particular – do a lot of the travel planning for multi-generational holidays.”

It’s an art Vivienne Pearson’s family has honed to perfection. Three generations of her family have holidayed together annually for so long she’s lost count. “My parents started it when we were teenagers,” she says.

Fast-forward about 25 years and the experience continues to evolve. »



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Travelling as a family gives grandparents invaluable experiences with their grand kids. BELOW: An Intrepid tour group at large in Vietnam.

Go with Gran



“There were little kids and babies for a decade. Then we reached a delightful new stage where all the cousins were old enough to largely look after themselves. We’re back to a fabulous dynamic of resting, reading, playing card and board games, eating, and only the occasional trip away from the house,” she says.

Vivienne’s crew usually aims for a rental with plenty of space, a pool and sometimes a tennis court. They take lots of games and ban

It’s the one time of year they all know they’ll see each other

screen time to promote socialising at “Nanna Helen’s beach house” (even though the venue changes annually, the name doesn’t). “The kids now range from nine to 20 and they all love it. It’s the one time of year they all know they’ll see each other,” Vivienne says.

Touring with grandma

Sometimes, it’s nice to have someone else do the organising, and multi-generational family travellers are no different. Dyan McKie from Intrepid Travel says the number of departures with three generations travelling together has doubled each year since 2013 (Thailand, Borneo and Vietnam are the most popular of their trips).

Dyan believes there are lots of reasons behind the boom. “Grandparents are

having experiences with their grandchildren that they may not have been able to have with their own children. They’ve retired early, and have the time to do it,” she says.

She’s also noticed multi-generational travel peaks when the kids hit late primary-school age. “Both the parents and grandparents realise that once kids get to high school, time goes fast,” Dyan says.

It’s likely fitness plays a role too. World Expeditions CEO, Sue Badyari, believes today’s Baby Boomer grandparents are far less sedentary than their predecessors. “They love to walk, trek and swim ... and want to share the physical, emotional and intellectual challenges with their grandchildren,” she says.

While Rhi Stanley didn’t book a tour, she found hiring a driver in Ho Chi Minh City was perfect for her recent multi-generational trip to Vietnam, a destination she chose for its combination of culture, relaxation and affordability. »



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Blood Testing

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Group adventures can help old friends reconnect.

“A private driver helped us work around our toddler’s nap times. Plus, he took the grandparents to places like the floating markets while we explored the many local parks,” she says.

Rhi planned these separate days in advance, but also scheduled in days alone with her dad while her husband stayed with their son.

“I think that helped Dad feel like he wasn’t just there for the babysitting,” she says.

Roadtripping

Many parents enjoy a good road trip, but chances are that few would have taken it as far as Marina Nicholl. An Australian of South African descent, Marina recently took a month-long trip with two other families to explore her home continent.

“They kept mentioning how much they’d like to visit Africa but didn’t want to do it by themselves ... I spent hours planning because I wanted them to love it,” she says.

Marina arranged a mix of apartments, Airbnb rentals and parks, and each family travelled



We did a lot together but having our own cars was perfect

in their own car. “We did a lot together but having our own cars was perfect to regroup as a family between places or on daytrips when kids can get cranky and tired,” she says.

The parents made a rule that kids couldn’t swap cars or rooms unless circumstances dictated, and the trip was so successful that they’re considering embarking on round two in 2019.

As for my group? Despite that brutal hill, there have been repeated calls for a second trip. While this time my son should be old enough to walk the hill himself, I’ll still be keeping an eye out for the wheelbarrow – and my trusty friend. ✈

Journalist and travel writer Sue White is the founder of community Facebook group, Kids Who Travel.

Tips for travelling with the grandparents

Be realistic.

Are the grandparents coming on your trip the hands-off or hands-on types? If they’re not highly involved with the kids when visiting your house for a long weekend, it’s unlikely they’ll turn into Mary Poppins the minute you’re in a tropical locale.

Have the conversation.

What do grandma and grandpa expect from the trip? Are they imagining you’ll all be hanging out together 24/7? Or will they be doing their own thing and joining you on occasion?

Avoid meal-time traps.

Let’s face it: meal times with kids can be tricky, let alone when you add in extra requirements and opinions. Talk through the reality in advance. Will you all eat together? If you are self-catering, who’ll do the cooking? Are you all on a similar dining budget? If so, is everyone happy to eat at a kid-friendly hour and location?

Sleep soundly.

You know your kids best: are they still waking up crying during the night? Will their first move each morning be to race down the hall to play with Grandpa? If so, perhaps avoid interconnecting rooms to give the older generation a sound night’s sleep. Many rental houses have a self-contained flat out the back: these can be a great way to give everyone a little more privacy. When in doubt, opt for a bigger space.

Mary Poppins of the sky

A long haul flight with a baby is rarely fun. Accompanied by her 10-month-old son, **SUE WHITE** took a few deep breaths and set off on a Sydney to Europe flight, during which she would put the promise of Etihad's Flying Nanny program – 'A helping hand in the sky' – to the test!

Adult passport: *check*. Baby's passport: *check*. Three changes of clothes for the 10-month-old, one extra for me (just in case) and a swag of spare nappies? *Check, check and check*. Flying Nanny? *Check*.
Yes, really.

Free for all!

I'm about to fly long haul on Etihad Airways, where for the last couple of years an onboard nanny service has been part of the package. Sounds great, right? But surely it's only available for those in First Class? Nope. Business Class then? Nope. For extra hard-earned cash on top of your international ticket price? Nope: access to the program is free for every Etihad passenger travelling with kids (and for unaccompanied minors).

It's such a simple idea that I can't believe this is a new thing. As anyone who has flown with a young baby will confirm, it's not always relaxing. Other passengers know it too. When parents step onboard and feel the eyes of hundreds of passengers on them, we all know the kid-free travellers are thinking only two possible things. One: "That poor woman." And two: "Please don't let her be sitting near me."

I can almost imagine a perplexed fan of Mary Poppins working behind the scenes at Etihad Airways conjuring up a solution. "Okay. So parents worry about flying long haul with their children. And other passengers don't love noisy kids. How do we keep everyone happy?" Cue the Flying Nanny program. The airline sent a bunch of cabin crew to a top nannying school in the United Kingdom (Norland College) to learn about how best to help parents. Now, they ensure that one nanny (or more) is installed on every long haul flight to help families from the time of boarding until they exit the aircraft.

Too good to be true?

Still, everything sounds good on paper, but like most parents flying long haul with a baby for the first time, it's with trepidation that I approach the whole experience. This is not just long haul, it's uber long



Oliver White ... ready to fly

haul; Sydney to Europe courtesy of a 14-hour stint, backed up by another seven hours in the air. Checking my pram at the gate (another benefit of flying Etihad – I've kept it with me for the baby to nap at the airport) and looking down at my unsuspecting 10-month-old son, I wonder if he knows what lies ahead.

More than a mere spoonful of sugar...

Stepping onboard, we're greeted by a smiling woman in an orange apron. "I'm Tracey, your Flying Nanny," she chimes in a UK accent. Given Ollie is strapped to my body, Tracey can see he's not on offer – but I can see she'd be happy to carry him if not. Instead, she grabs my hand luggage and helps us settle into our seat. It quickly becomes apparent we've scored a bassinette (most airlines will do this, although there's often stiff competition depending on the number of babies on board), a neighbour with an 11 year old, and a nanny who genuinely seems to love babies.

Turns out, I could have saved a lot of brain cells





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worrying. I could also have jammed a lot less into my carry on. Nappies, for example. (“We have them,” offers Tracey.) The nannies also provide entertainment kits for older kids and are proactive in explaining the service. “Call us if you need any mess cleaned up. Call us if you need nappies. Call if you need help. Call us if he needs entertaining.”

It’s nice to hear, but what’s more reassuring is that Flying Nannies actually know what they’re doing.

Support all the way

It’s easy to ‘want’ to help someone with a baby, but there’s an art to it. Talking to the Flying Nannies, I discover their training is about just this; before taking action, what will be the most useful – supporting the parent, or supporting the child?

I quickly appreciate that the Flying Nannies on both our flights engage with my son, but are not ‘in his face’. While employees in regular contact with kids can be good at this, that’s more of a hit and miss proposition. (Take the enthusiastic staffer on one European train who says “Hi” to my baby before deliberately flashing a laser light in his eyes as a game.)

Of course, it’s still a long flight, and there are downsides. Baby food here really means baby food – purees. If your bub is on more ‘solid’ solids, bring something heartier with you. Glancing at the 11 year old dining two seats away on pasta and fruit salad, it seems the older kids’ meals look pretty good. (Actually, she rejects the fruit, but kindly passes it to my son, who digs in.)

There’s also the small matter of sleep. If you do happen to jag a bassinette, it pays to be forewarned

that on most airlines, if your baby is asleep and the seatbelt sign comes on you’ll have to lift him or her out. It’s a sensible safety precaution of course, but one that leaves me feeling slightly apprehensive at the first sign of every bump.

Smooth soaring

While it’s tempting to feign disaster for the nannies to work their magic, the final result is pretty low key. It’s something I often hear from parents flying long haul – the idea of it is usually worse than the reality. Ollie sleeps nine of fourteen hours on leg one (and even I clock about six hours). I eat, thanks to nannies ensuring the meals are well timed. I go to the toilet with someone keeping an eye on the sleeping bub. And I decide to test them out on the free nappies (yes, they exist). Still, it goes so smoothly I have to wonder. Is it the bassinette? My good-natured son? Or simply Tracey waving her magical stardust over the whole experience?

Even during our nanny’s breaks, I feel like I’ve had to fight off cabin crew offers to hold my son, which makes organising my bags and actually functioning feel very civilised. But if they’re angling for a nanny role, they have some stiff competition. The pram is at the door, and so is Tracey, with a handmade card for Ollie to celebrate his first long haul flight. She’s delighted it went so well, and if delighted is a synonym for relieved, then so am I.

> Etihad’s Flying Nanny program commenced in September 2013. etihad.com/en-au/experience-etihad/family-travel/onboard/

The writer flew courtesy of Etihad Airways.

A SLEEPY sanctuary

AS BALI GETS BUSIER, FAMILIES ARE CROSSING THE WATERS TO SLEEPY NUSA LEMBONGAN.

WORDS SUE WHITE



For all parents who travel with their kids, there's a moment we've secretly dreamed of. Yours may be sitting on a surfboard in a tropical location, kids adjacent on their own boards. Or perhaps it's that first cycle trip when they ride their own bikes beside you.

My own family travel fantasy involves a snorkel mask and comes true minutes after my 4-year-old Ollie and I launch ourselves off a boat into the clear waters of sleepy Nusa Lembongan.

"Mum! Fish! Thousands of coloured fish!" he cries from behind his bulky life jacket, dog-paddling furiously before dipping his head in for another look.

Nusa Lembongan offers our family plenty of travel firsts – but most importantly it offers sanctuary. Bali remains beautiful, but even long-time fans admit it's getting busier. As I investigate quieter family friendly options, the name of this small island continually pops up as somewhere worthy of more than a daytrip.

On paper, I can see why. Firstly, the transit is easy; Nusa Lembongan is just 30 to 40 minutes by fast boat from Sanur to the 'port' at the small village of Jungutbatu. It's a beach landing, but boat operators have perfected the art of carrying three bags a time on their shoulders. Secondly, there are plenty of accommodation choices, although families are best to avoid clifftop hotels, due to their endless steps.

Twenty-four hours before my snorkelling success story, we spend our first day exploring Nusa Lembongan on land. For backpackers and kid-free adults, this is usually done by scooter. For families, it's by golf buggy. After a short lesson from the owner of Arjun Buggy Rentals, we are off, snorkels and swimwear strapped on the back seats. "Faster!" Ollie cries, ever the adventurer.

Aside from the occasional sign and a tourist map tucked underneath my right thigh, I have little idea where we are going, so I keep our speed through the winding jungle roads at a conservative pace. It doesn't matter – on an island this size, there's more than enough time for the highlights: the calm waters of Mushroom Bay, the crashing waves of Dream Beach and the thickly forested road leading to the island's mangrove forest (good for a short kayak adventure).

Of course, those are my own highlights. As it turns out, my second in command has another other addition.

"Stop – what's that?" Ollie calls urgently from the passenger seat about an hour into our exploration. I pull the golf buggy over and shift it into neutral – a simple exercise involving one foot on the brake and a flick of a switch.

He vigorously gestures to the tall double waterslides of Sunday Beach Water Park, which I've quietly tried to sneak past.



Sandy Bay Beach Club's casual eatery offers an array of gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, vegetarian and vegan meals.



Many of Nusa Lembongan's beaches feature unspoilt views.

Nusa Lembongan

Gentle giants
Snorkelling alongside manta rays in their prime feeding ground will remain a lifelong memory.

Lazy daze
Base yourselves at Sandy Bay Beach Club when you want to be barefoot and beachfront.

Paddle along
Not a fan of submerging into the deep blue? Explore above it in a kayak!

Feel the thrill
When it's time for some curated fun, Sunday Beach Water Park will have you covered.

A true gem
Dream Beach is an absolute, er, dream – 115m of white sand and one of the quietest places to while away the day.



“Do you think 4-year-olds can go on that?” Honesty prevails, despite knowing what comes next for my legs. Two hours later, I beg off slide duty and we continue our loose circumnavigation of Nusa Lembongan, passing daytrippers returning from snorkelling for manta ray sightings and local children riding motorbikes through the tiny villages.

This time, we are united on our destination: Sandy Bay Beach Club. Flopping onto one of the double beach beds perched on the sand adjacent to the infinity pool, I glance around and learn we’re not the only family that has realised this is the perfect respite from two hours of climbing waterslides. One neighbouring group has a whole baby play area set up on their beach bed, allowing them to entertain their little while watching the waves crash just metres away. Others come and go from the pool, where views of the beach and the upcoming sunset make supporting toddler swimming endeavours virtually relaxing.

Famished, I pour over the menu: jackfruit and avocado tacos for me, spaghetti meatballs for Ollie. Plus drinks, of course: a chocolate smoothie for my son and a suitably impressive cocktail for me. On second thought, I make that a mocktail – they come complete with a coconut paleta (ice block) sticking out the top. Plus, I forgot, the golf buggy calls and I’m driving. **ft**

Sue White is the founder of the free Facebook community Kids Who Travel. She travelled with the support of various local operators.

Go to familytravel.com.au for travel inspiration, ideas and tips to turn your travel dreams into reality. Be sure to sign up to the e-newsletter to receive the best family content direct to your inbox.

NEED TO KNOW

GETTING THERE
A 30- to 40-minute boat trip from Sanur. Choose a reputable operator like Rocky Fast Cruise (rockyfastcruise.com).

GETTING AROUND
Hire a golf buggy – it’s a fun and useful vehicle to help families explore the land. They seat four and cost about AUD\$80 per day. We hired ours from Arjun Buggy Rental (62 812 367 5667).

To explore the island by sea, most hotels will organise a snorkelling trip to find manta rays. Lembongan Water Sport is a good option with kids; our trip had a strong safety focus.

STAYING THERE
There’s plenty of choice! We loved Song Lambung Beach Huts (family rooms available) for its short, flat walk along a clifftop track to plenty of restaurants. The 20m stroll to a calm beach was perfect when we wanted to try somewhere other than the hotel’s mid-size infinity pool.

WHEN TO GO
Dry season is May to October, however Nusa Lembongan is significantly less rainy than Bali proper, so off season can be good too.

BEST FOR
Kids of any age, as long as you’re not after the kids’ clubs that abound in other parts of Bali. Nusa Lembongan’s offerings are quieter, but there’s plenty to do for three to four nights.

5 MORE FAMILY ISLAND GETAWAYS YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF

- TIOMAN ISLAND, MALAYSIA**
A nature reserve ringed by pristine beaches off the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. Get there via an easy coach trip from Singapore, followed by a two-hour ferry from Mersing.
- LOFOTEN ISLANDS, NORWAY**
A unique daytrip where visitors arrive and depart by boat to spend the day walking the lush green hills and admiring whale skeletons laid out on the deserted beaches.

- ISCHIA, ITALY**
Go for the hot springs, fabulous food and local vibe – this island just off Naples is the place Italians choose over Capri (visit Capri on a daytrip instead).
- IONA, SCOTLAND**
Getting to this Inner Hebrides island takes some doing, but you’ll pass through some of Scotland’s best scenery en route. Visitors can’t bring cars over, so explore by taxi or, even better, bicycle.
- ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO**
Now that it has become daytrip fodder for resort guests from nearby Cancun, 7km-long Isla Mujeres is far less sleepy than it used to be – but this Caribbean beauty rewards those staying a few days; serenity prevails after the daytrippers leave.

images
Main: The bar at Sandy Bay Beach Club features cocktails, mocktails, smoothies, juices and fizzes.
Inset: This swing at Sunset Beach is the perfect place to get your feet wet.

SAIL AWAY

Why aren't more families going on river cruises? Sue White heads to the Rhine to investigate. WORDS & IMAGES SUE WHITE

After driving in relative silence through the streets of Basel, Switzerland, our taxi driver suddenly pipes up and starts pointing vigorously.

"See the left side of the street? That's Switzerland. The right side? Germany!"

It's a separation that continues to astound me over the next nine days as we cruise the Rhine. Morning? Germany. Afternoon? France. This side of the river? Germany. That side? France.

As my 5-year-old son Ollie and I board the MS Douce France – a 55-cabin cruise boat from French company CroisiEurope – for our Rhine river adventure, I'm well aware that other unique aspects lie ahead. Unlike large cruise ships, river cruises usually cater more for grandparents than young families. There'll be no kids' clubs, no waterslides, no tailored children's program and, very

likely, no other kids. So why go?

First, for the ease of cruising. Whatever the style, cruising means unpacking once, no time-sucking logistics and plenty of good food. River cruising has an added bonus: the size of the ship means small towns rather than big cities – better for kids (and far more peaceful for adults).

Of course, our Rhine itinerary has its own advantages. Each day we tackle one or two destinations, sometimes in different countries, and spend the bulk of our waking hours off the boat.

Given that the organised excursions are targeted at adults, we make our own fun on shore. In the beautiful but tourist-filled French town of Colmar, we replace a tour of Musée Unterlinden with watching punts navigate impossibly low bridges in Little Venice, wading in the canal's icy waters

and buying dried pineapple, papaya and apple from a store so beautiful the piles of fruits look like art. There's still time to pass a peaceful hour in Colmar's toy museum (Musée du Jouet), where we build with French blocks, watch the model trains and giggle at my toy choices from the 1980s.

On the fringe of Germany's Black Forest in the small town of Breisach, we climb the cobblestone streets up to the town's small cathedral before dropping in at the local riverside playground. As local children play hide and seek in German, I push Ollie on the swings, eyeing the reconstructed buildings in the distance.

Other solo adventures abound. We join the Swiss residents in a large park in Basel instead of taking a bus tour; we reward ourselves with a ride of a two-storey carousel after climbing the 300 ▶



River cruising on the Rhine



Colmar's toy museum



Morning exercise onboard



5 BEST RIVER-CRUISE DESTINATIONS

MEKONG, SOUTHEAST ASIA

RV Lan Diep travels through Vietnam and Cambodia.

RHINE, EUROPE

A bucket-list river cruise for many, available from CroisiEurope.

MISSISSIPPI, USA

Cruise through America on a paddlewheel boat.

NILE, EGYPT

A variety of budgets are catered for, from luxury ships to basic felucca.

KERALA, INDIA

Backwater cruises offer a peaceful way to traverse the rivers and lagoons.



Strasbourg



We spent most of our waking hours off the boat



Doing laundry the old fashioned way

NEED TO KNOW



GETTING THERE

Fly direct to Switzerland on Emirates or Etihad from Australia.



BEST TIME TO GO

Weather-wise the best time for a European river cruise is late June to mid-October. The cheapest time is late October, November and December because of the colder weather and fewer tourists.



Colmar

steps of Strasbourg's stunning cathedral; we become experts at navigating the pram over cobblestone streets in small town after small town. In Amsterdam we choose pedal power, booking ourselves in for a tour of the Dutch countryside with We Bike Amsterdam, Ollie content on the back of my bike as we ride along the top of a dyke in search of windmills.

Back onboard, there is one group activity I'm delighted not to miss. North of Mainz in Germany lies the 'Romantic Rhine', a strip of the river dotted with so many castles the list runs to an A4 page. As my son plays with the ship's staff, I join other passengers to learn of the sieges, wars, builds and rebuilds occurring here over the past 700-odd years.

For four hours, glass of sparkling wine in hand, I play a form of castle tennis, looking left and right from the deck to spot Gothic castles perched on hills, ruins resplendent among vineyards and villages hugging each side of the river.

Before this trip, I'd have imagined the lack of other children would be a problem, but instead we enjoy bonding time together. We curl up in the ship's lounge and do drawings, watching the world go by. We make cubbies in our generously-sized cabin. We even join in the occasional adult activities, like the extremely gentle morning exercise class

and the trivia (where we dominate, taking home a fluffy Alsace duck toy as a prize).

Of course, it's not all castles and cubby houses. There is one challenge: dinnertime. On night one we attempt the official 7.30pm start, but as the meal drags out through multiple courses, Ollie quickly fades. It's not pretty by 9.15pm, so the next day I request his meal early in our cabin. I specify 6pm and simple and decide to eat there too.

Surprisingly, evenings turn out to be memorable despite being trapped in a cabin. Each night after dining, I make my own show; topped up by a complimentary glass of sparkling wine from the bar, I open the large sliding window I've not let Ollie know exists and watch the Rhine slide by as he sleeps.

I wave to campers outside their motorhomes along the riverbanks, spy on couples picnicking on blankets as the sun sets, and as the late European summer nights go on, I feel deeply, deeply content. **ft**

Sue White is a travel writer and the founder of the free Facebook community Kids Who Travel.



Go to familytravel.com.au for more ideas and inspiration for holidaying in Europe with kids. Sign up to receive our weekly newsletter, full of family holiday ideas and deals, direct to your inbox.



TIPS FOR RIVER-CRUISE WITH KIDS

- Carefully consider the organised excursion. Some may have long drives, while others simply begin on foot from the port. Ask plenty of questions in advance before paying for additional excursions you may not undertake.
- Do your research. If the boat is docked for a while, research children's activities nearby. Then mix the 'adult' activity (say a walk of the old town, perhaps partly with the group for the guided information) with a kid-friendly one like visiting a playground.
- Take snacks. River cruise ships usually have just one restaurant, so you may need snacks between meals.
- Make dinner work for you. The adult nature of river cruising may mean dinner comes too late for your child. Organise to have this meal in the cabin at an earlier time - yours too if you want to sleep early!
- Beware of the balconies. Balconies are lovely for adults but stressful for families with young children. If there's a window that opens onto a balcony, don't open it when your child is awake and see if you can lock it.
- Mix it up with older kids. Look for a cycle plus cruise option - these abound but can book out quickly.



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LONDON CALLING!

Between Big Ben and black cabs, double decker buses and red phone boxes, London is filled with icons from childhood. So there's something special about heading there with your own kids. Of course, the London of those footloose, kid-free years is quite a different place with a bub in tow, says **SUE WHITE**, but with a bit of planning and a dash of courage, it is just as fabulous!





Tiny Explorers Messy Play at Kensington Palace

The right approach

There are a few ways to tackle London's activities with a baby. If yours is under six months old, you will likely be thinking: "Well, the baby is pretty small and basically is happy almost anywhere". Using this approach you can happily cart him or her around major tourist sites, particularly if you have a good day sleeper and time your activities well.

For slightly older babies, you'll take a second option: combining major attractions with really baby-friendly play breaks.

Sharing the sights

The London Transport Museum is super interesting, with two good kids' play areas, and is a great place to pit stop after looking around neighbouring Covent Garden. The **Victoria & Albert Museum** has a gorgeous large courtyard with paddling pool that's perfect for a break and some crawl time for baby. If you're by the Thames, the **Tate Modern** gallery also has a fun kids area and a baby-friendly café!

While you're riverside, the daytime activities at **Southbank's** cultural precinct – think buskers galore and free puppet shows – are all naturally baby-friendly (and it's near the London Eye ferris wheel, for the adults). For a more local take on the views across to Parliament and Big Ben, head to the café, bar and

rooftop community garden above Southbank's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Prams can be carried upstairs if you have two people, or take the tiny cargo lift around the side (an experience you won't forget in a hurry – you have to hold the button down the whole way up).

Continuing the approach of combining adult and baby-friendly fun, head to London's **wonderful parks**. Because a baby is usually pretty happy on any old patch of grass, smart travellers will combine park



“Buses in London are very accessible and the city's Docklands Light Rail is pram-friendly. Whichever you use, purchase an Oyster card online from visitbritainshop.com before you leave home!”

visits with another activity, like a day at **Greenwich**. Gorgeous for wandering around, its covered seven-day market has delicious food for picnicking on expansive grassy areas below the observatory. Afterwards, enticing your baby to stand with one foot either side of the Greenwich Meantime marker makes a fun photo, just remember: the observatory is on top of a very steep hill – a real workout if pushing a pram. (**TIP:** It costs £16.50 per adult to access the prime photo spot behind the museum.) Photo or no photo, Greenwich is easy to combine with Southbank by taking a local boat, rather than booking a cruise tour, along the Thames. Allow the whole day to do both.

If you're jaunting to another famous spot of London greenery, **Hampstead Heath**, go on a Friday when historic Kenwood House holds its under 5s events for £1 (10.30am-12 noon). Combine baby play with adult art gazing (Monet's et al) before exploring Hampstead Heath together.

Just for baby!

Given that London is also filled with incredible baby-only (and kid-only) activities there's a third approach: schedule a few baby-specific outings during your stay.

Little Angel Theatre, a famous puppetry children's theatre in Islington, schedules specific performances that babies can attend. In Covent Garden, **The Royal Opera House** has a wonderful children's program: babies sit on a play mat in front of the stage watching kid-friendly opera performances. Go early: the upstairs bar area is a lovely space to wait and play.

Indulge in some messy play at **London's Palaces**. Yes, you read correctly: for just £6 babies can attend the multi-sensory programs at **Hampton Court Palace** or (closer to town) **Kensington Palace**. (There are also sessions for toddlers to four year olds). Make sure to book – these sell out fast.

From far left: Relaxing by the pond at the V & A
Play area for kids at London Transport Museum
Playing in the family-friendly rooftop Community Garden, Southbank



London essentials

Above: Stand with one foot either side of the Greenwich Meantime marker

Sue White is a travel writer and founder of **babieswhotravel.com**. She is also mum to little Ollie, and *Out & About with Kids'* newest columnist – see **TODDLER TRAVEL P. 126** of this issue!

Transport

Forget about getting into the city from Heathrow by tube. Instead, either use the **Heathrow Express train** to town, then a black cab to your hotel. Or, for about the same price (cheaper if there's more than one adult), book a **Blackberry Car** transfer from Heathrow. There's nothing like spotting a guy with a sign bearing your name, after stepping off a long-haul flight with a baby; you won't regret it.

London's underground is famously pram-unfriendly, but it can be done with two adults (or one adult with a baby carrier, pram and a willingness to ask for help). Ask passengers or staff to assist lifting the pram in and out of trains, up and down stairs and on and off the (often) long escalators. The new Jubilee line (out to Olympic Park) is a wonderful exception: finally, lifts! (If you're out this way don't miss the **Discover Children's Story** - its play centre and story times are both superb.)

> discover.org.uk

Buses in London are very accessible and you can see the sights out the windows! The city's **Docklands Light Rail** is pram-friendly. Whichever



Blackberry car transfer from Heathrow

you use, buy an Oyster card (purchase online from the Visit Britain shop before leaving home).

Sleeping

If the budget allows, a stay at London's **Athenaeum** hotel is superb – it was perfect! Yes, there are cots, baby toys and an excellent location opposite Green Park, and the hotel is just a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace. You will be in love with this luxury property well before you arrive - the pre-visit survey from their kids' concierge even asks what type of pillow you like!

> athenaeumhotel.com

Eating

High chairs abound in London's cafes so you don't have to limit your dining out to chain restaurants and kids eateries. For picnics in London's parks, **Marks & Spencer** chains and **Pret A Manger** both have 'food to go', as well as ready-made meals.

> littleangeltheatre.com

> blackberrycars.com

Messy play at London's Palaces

> hrp.org.uk – See "Tiny Explorers"

> **City Walks London** (Bloomsbury). 50 adventures on foot. These gorgeous cards fit in your handbag – just choose an area and stroll for an hour or two following the itinerary and map.

> **Lonely Planet's Make My Day, London**. The handy 'flip' panels calculate travel times between activities so you can mix and match sensibly.

> bringyourownbaby.com is brimming with ideas, from baby-friendly jazz performances and comedy clubs to a changing rota of fabulous baby-made cultural activities across London.

> visitlondon.com

> visitbritain.com



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FINDING MALOLO

On the slice of Fijian heaven that's Malolo Island Resort, it's hard to know who is happier: the kids or the adults. **Sue White** does her best to find out.



Bobbing gently in the sturdy tender transferring us from our South Sea Cruises ferry to the much awarded, Fijian owned, Malolo Island Resort, I ponder what lies ahead. It bodes well: a few hundred metres away there's a band playing at the end of a long wooden jetty; the weather is utopian; and we are headed to a famously kid-friendly option. But my child, well, he likes his mum.

It takes just 4.5 seconds of arriving on the jetty to realise that while I may know my child, I don't yet understand Malolo's real magic. One staff member takes our bags while another waves hello to me, swoops up my toddler, and starts cooing over him as they walk ahead of me towards land.

I suck in my breath. Surely, it's now that my 2.5 year old will do his usual protest: "Mummmm!" But no; he's high fiving everyone, having his hair ruffled and practicing his newly learned "Bula". He seems to have forgotten I'm even there.

Located in the Mamanuca Island chain, Malolo Island Resort is an easy ferry ride from the main island Port of Denarau. During the two-hour journey our South Sea Cruises ship drops off and collects

visitors from numerous islands, giving me a good sense of place. We share the boat with day trippers, couples headed to adults-only options like Likuliku, Malolo's sister resort, and no shortage of families.

That's unsurprising. In many ways the Mamanuca's are the ideal Fijian islands for families: their proximity to Nadi and Denarau makes it possible to leave the main tourist hub at 9am and be on a remote beach well before lunch.

The next few days quickly become a blur of what I imagine most families travel to Fiji for: sun, sand, good food and a hefty dose of downtime.

While the chilled out Beach Bar competes successfully for much of my spare time, our real home on Malolo is our beachfront bure. One of just 46 on Malolo, our bure keeps the island holiday dream alive



We're not sure who's happier here on Malolo, adults or kids? Possibly a tie...



"...while I may know my child, I don't yet understand Malolo's real magic."

from dawn 'til dusk: the sand just off the front porch offers hours of play time, in part thanks to a few mini metal cars I've brought for the trip; adults get swung on the nearby hammock by a toddler in the "I can do it myself" stage; and there is snorkelling in the marine reserve just a thirty-odd metre stroll away from our door.

True, the sleeping arrangements throw me at first: it's not separate rooms – suite style – but instead, the adults area is divided by a low wall from my toddler's cot in the lounge area (it won't fit anywhere else). It turns out to be a moot point: he's so exhausted after a day of charming the staff; doubling on the front of my kayak (mini life jackets are provided); and 'trying' to snorkel (a hilarious effort I try to support, out of kindness) that he's out cold by bedtime. Most parents I talk to on Malolo report

the same phenomena: give a kid fresh air for twelve hours a day and they crash at bedtime, no problem. Apparently most adults here do the same.

Food on the resort is fresh and varied. While I catch many parents looking longingly at the adults-only Treetops restaurant, the family-friendly Terrace offers a different kind of Malolo magic: on our first night, my jet-lagged son is entertained by the waiters before being scooped up by another staff member for a calming cuddle before I can say, "Here, I'll get it".

However, in our family, lunch quickly becomes our favourite dining experience. My son has made a decision: he's with the band that plays at the Beach Bar each day. He spends every lunch hour perched at the band members' feet, thriving on his newfound freedom before periodically ducking back to our nearby table to eat calamari. I listen to the music, sip virgin Piña Colodas, read my book and count my blessings daily.

Our few days on Malolo pass in a similarly relaxed haze. We play endlessly in the mid-sized pool; search for crabs on the beachfront opposite our bure; lie face down on the jetty looking at the fish swim below in the crystalline clear waters; and join a few offshore excursions.



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Ready and waiting to serve up your favourite cocktail at the swim-up bar, plenty of family-friendly watersports to choose from, ALL the kids love Kids Club here, spacious bedrooms.

In the local village on the other side of the island, we drop in at the school supported by the resort. It's so hot that, aside from our energetic guide Jesse, I'm the only adult to 'Hokey Pokey' with schoolkids. Emerging a sweaty mess, I give a cash donation to the school's donation box, buy wooden trinkets in the community hall from the local women, and wish I'd remembered to bring something more than money and bad dance moves to donate.

Memorable for different reasons is our Island Hopping breakfast tour. Zipping away from Malolo in a speedboat early one morning, we head across the open waters for a remote island picnic. On arrival, we have to jump off the side of the boat and wade to shore, something my 2.5 year old does with abandon: he has no hesitation jumping into the welcoming arms of Operations Manager Zac (and that's even before Zac offers to build him sandcastles while I snorkel).

There's solo time too, thanks to the Fijian Meimei (nanny system). Malolo, like most family-friendly resorts in Fiji, has a Kids' Club, though my son is too young to join, for a small hourly payment he gets access and one-to-one care. Given that the rest of our days here are so kid-friendly, I use this option just a couple of hours each day: once to have a massage in the tree-lined spa; once to lie by the seemingly underutilised adults-only pool (I'm not sure if that's



due to its proximity to the family pool, or the fact that it competes with so many other good options); and once to enjoy a long stint of snorkelling and paddle boarding.

I quickly realise that the only difficulty in our holiday here is going to be leaving. It took 4.5 seconds to fall in love with Malolo Island Resort. I suspect it's going to take a lot longer to forget it.

The writer stayed courtesy of Malolo Island Resort.



Kids bond instantly with all staff at Malolo Island Resort

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Fiji's Meimei

Fijian nanny... Meimei I?



Our Toddler Travel columnist, Sue White, is a journalist, travel writer, founder of babieswhotravel.com and mum to an energetic, well travelled toddler. She's also the moderator of a Facebook community where travel-keen parents talk tips and tricks for family travel: [facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel](https://www.facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel) (all welcome).

When most parents think of a Fijian holiday there's a fair chance they're thinking three things: sun, sand and kids' clubs. But if you're travelling with a toddler, many of Fiji's much-loved kids' clubs are off limits. The rules differ between resorts, but generally children can't be dropped at a kids club until they are three or four years old. That's where Fijian nannies come in.

Known as 'Meimei' (Fijian for 'carer'), Fijian nannies are unsurprisingly popular with families holidaying with young children and toddlers. Not only can a Meimei give your child one on one attention anywhere in the resort (sometimes they can even take two kids for the same price), but they can play with them at the kids' club, where sandpits, playgrounds and non-stop fun typically awaits.

For families with older kids, this can be a winner too: all five children from the two families holidaying with us at Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort on the Coral Coast were universally keen to get to Kids Club almost every morning, afternoon and evening. Hiring a Meimei meant their younger siblings could tag along, with a personal carer in tow.

Meimei are available at many Fijian resorts, but Outrigger's Meimei have a particularly good reputation. About 9000 children use Outrigger's Meimei every year and more than 34 full-time nannies now work in this large, family-friendly resort.

Across Fiji, Meimei services usually come with a price tag, unlike kids' clubs (which are mostly free for resort guests). Outrigger's Meimei are available for children from six months of age: for just AU\$225 parents get four consecutive days of eight hours care between 9am and 11pm. By Australian standards, that's great value.

Thinking of hiring a Meimei for your toddler in Fiji? Here are a few tips to help you make the most of the experience.

Tip 1: Timing

Some toddlers are used to day care, and will happily spend the bulk of their day with their Meimei, especially if they are around other children. My two-and-a-half year old? Not so much: he wants mum time first and foremost.

But his mother also likes the odd bit of downtime: a few kid-free hours each day on holiday makes for a very happy parent! However, I had to be realistic. My



Meimei is Fijian for 'nanny', one-on-one attention for your kids

toddler isn't used to day care, so eight hours away from me every day in a new location would have led to a mini revolt. Instead, I used my Meimei hours strategically, via a series of short stints spread across each day.

Each morning, I joined my friends at the swim-up bar at the adults-only pool for a couple of hours (they congregated here promptly at 10.05am, as soon as their kids were signed into Kids Club).

During one of my son's afternoon sleeps, I enjoyed a leisurely massage at the superb hilltop Bebe Spa (highly recommended); on my return, he and his Meimei were happily playing in the sandpit at Kids Club. I could definitely have stayed away





longer without him even noticing.

Then, every evening, I'd duck off for a kid-free dinner with my friends. The plan worked for everyone: my son and I still had plenty of time together each day to play in Outrigger's gigantic pool; wander the leafy resort; or watch the local choir sing over a meal at a beachside restaurant.

Tip 2: Have realistic expectations

It's truly amazing to be able to travel with young children and get some downtime. Meimei schedules are flexible (usually you need to give about three hours' notice), the Fijians are famously friendly, and I've never seen a cranky Meimei. But still, hiring a nanny in Fiji is different to hiring a nanny at home. At home, with a regular carer, I think it's okay to have a laundry list of expectations: what my child eats and drinks are prime examples of areas where I'm not particularly flexible as a parent.

But in Fiji, be aware that your toddler's carefully monitored home-based habits may dissolve. As one example, healthy meals often turn into hot chips, sausage rolls and juice if you are hiring a Meimei to do meal times (at Outrigger, this is a popular part of the service: lots of toddlers are taken by their Meimei to the special children's mealtimes). For most parents, this is no big deal: for me, I preferred to take him to meals myself so I could choose treats when they suited me and I could monitor what was happening.

Tip 3: Toilet training trials

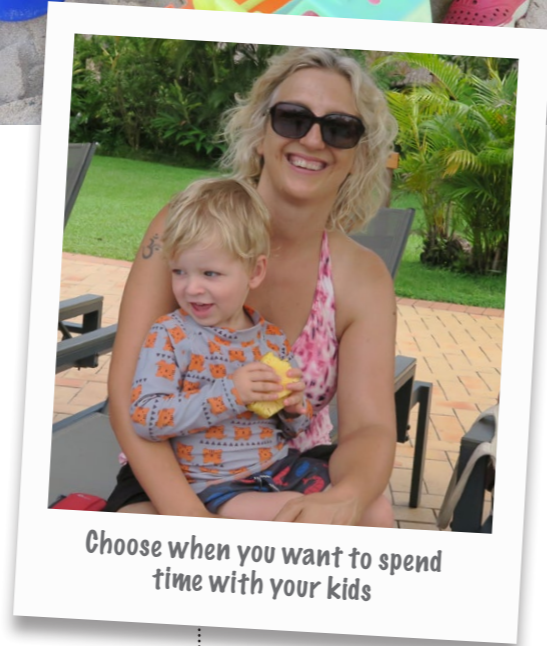
After trying Meimei at three resorts with my newly (aka: mostly) toilet-trained toddler, I learned this:

relax about toilet training while your child is with a Fijian nanny.

If your toddler is still in nappies fulltime, no problem. But let's face it: the nuance of dealing with an 'almost' toilet-trained toddler is difficult for any parent, let alone a carer who only has them for a few hours over a few days. (Just one reason many parents decide to delay toilet training until AFTER a big trip.)

After explaining repeatedly at other resorts: "He needs to be taken to the toilet in one hour. He won't tell you this, but take him anyway and he will go," and getting lots of nods (but no results) from the Meimei in question, by the time I got to Outrigger I knew what would happen: they'd just let him keep happily playing until it was too late. Instead, I sent him off in a nappy, or, if he protested, with a couple of extra changes of pants and chalked it up to 'what happens on the road, stays on the road'.

Overall: would I use Fiji's Meimei again? Yes: particularly those at Outrigger, where the system is really well setup – this is a core part of their business. Would I recommend Meimei services to others heading to Fiji? With the above caveats in mind – definitely: it's one of the most relaxing holidays you could probably have with a toddler in tow – something I don't say lightly!



Choose when you want to spend time with your kids

FROM TOP LEFT:
Most staff at Fijian resorts are great with kids.
Meimeis also look after their pint-size charges at kids club.



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BABY & TODDLER *Travel*





Kings of the sandcastles

At Noosa, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, toddlers can be kings of the sand.



Our Toddler Travel columnist, Sue White, is a journalist, travel writer, founder of babieswhotravel.com and mum to an energetic, well travelled, toddler. She's also the moderator of a Facebook community where travel-keen parents talk tips and tricks for family travel: [facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel](https://www.facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel) (all welcome).

On the surface, beaches and toddlers seem a perfect holiday mix – what's not to love? But like everything toddler-travel related, parents need to choose wisely: the right distance from civilisation, the right weather, the right size waves – it's a surprisingly long list. When I recently decided on Noosa, just 90 minutes north of Brisbane, for a beach holiday with my two year old, I lucked out: this is the perfect destination for toddlers and their gear-lugging-still-slightly-sleep-deprived plus ones, otherwise known as parents.

So why does Noosa work so well for a beach holiday with a toddler?

First: it's beautiful. Lush greenery dots the whole region, meaning that even if you're not out enjoying the area's many walks, adults still feel they are somewhere tropical and relaxing.

Second: it's easy to get to – the 90-minute drive from Brisbane airport (or fly direct into Sunshine Coast airport) is short enough that we don't need breaks: a bonus, given I rarely drive more than two hours without needing to provide my son with food or a playground stop.

Third: the weather. Sure, Noosa doesn't replicate the warmer winter temperatures of Far North Queensland, but it's still warm enough for an easy escape from the cold down south.

Fourth: the beach. I am the first to admit, Noosa's Main Beach is busy, especially between the flags, which, if you're travelling with toddlers, is where you'll spend your time. To be fair, walk 500m away from the flags and serenity abounds, but so do bigger waves. Given that toddlers need to be watched continually near the ocean, the calm, clear (fish-filled) waters of Noosa's Main Beach make for a stress-free holiday experience (complete with good coffee just metres away).

Tricks and tips for a Noosa holiday

Food forage: For adults visiting without kids – or enjoying a date night – there are plenty of restaurants to choose from (try Wasabi for Japanese by the river, or Sails back at Main Beach). But if you're travelling with a toddler, pack a picnic lunch and eat it on the boardwalk overlooking the water before heading home for a midday nap: remember too, it's a holiday, naps aren't just for kids! If you don't get to the supermarket, Noosa's main shopping thoroughfare, upmarket Hastings



Excitement @ Australia Zoo

Street, is just metres from the sand and has endless café options. There's also a small food court if you're after a cheap, quick bite.

My kingdom for a park: Parking is famously tricky in Noosa – partly due to the town's popularity, but also partly due to the peninsula layout of the beach area. The best idea is to forget fantasies of parking at the Noosa National Park end of Main Beach and, instead, drive slowly along to the far end of Hastings Street and park for free under the shade of the trees bordering Claude Batten Drive. From there it's a peaceful ten-minute walk through trees, along a pram-friendly boardwalk (kids will love the resident bush turkeys), to arrive between the flags.

Activities off the beach

Even on a beach holiday, there are times when you hanker for some time off the sand. While there are plenty of options for sand-free outings, our favourites were the following four:

Eumundi Markets. Just 15 minutes drive from Noosa, this cutesy village bustles on Saturdays (and to a lesser extent, Wednesdays). Go early: there's plenty of food for breakfast or



Noosa Main Beach

New to the beach with a toddler?

A FEW TIPS:

- Good news! Unlike many activities, beach outings can be timed to work in with a toddler's lunchtime nap, keeping you out of the sun during the hottest part of the day.
- Toddler hats need toggles or you'll be constantly battling 'noooo'. Even with a toggle, toddlers may still complain, but only until they are distracted.
 - Sunscreen applied before arrival on sand: a no brainer, right? (*I learned this the hard way – twice.*)
 - Beach toys are excellent but don't think you can't organise something makeshift: on 'organised' days we used buckets, spades and tip trucks (the bigger the better), while on the 'looser' occasions a Tupperware container and large serving spoon borrowed from our holiday home's kitchen did just as good a job. (Those days also provided a great excuse to get an extra coffee: we filled the empty takeaway cup with sand.)



an early lunch, and the shady playground is a hit with kids of all ages.

The Ginger Factory. While there are playgrounds and other activities on offer at this Yandina attraction, toddlers will love the historic steam train that makes a slow loop around the expansive, tree-filled grounds. Where else can you find a train ride where the driver throws food for the local chickens en route?

Kids \$7
gingerfactory.com.au

Australia Zoo. This big-ticket attraction is about an hour's drive from Noosa. It's a full day outing, so take the pram for your toddler's nap, and plan your day well. For slightly older kids (say 4+ years) Australia Zoo's free shows are well worth scheduling around, but toddlers will mostly be happy to wander the grounds, feed the kangaroos and point at the numerous residents being taken for walks (we saw wombats and tiger cubs out for strolls with zoo staff on our day here). A hit!

From \$172 for a family of four
australiazoo.com.au

The Noosa River. Back in town, there's a second spot that's fabulous for toddlers: the Noosa River,



All aboard The Ginger Factory train

just next to the Noosa Yacht and Rowing Club on Gympie Terrace. The generous (but often packed) playground has slides, sand and action for all ages although, be warned, there's no fence and, given the location 20m from the riverfront, you may need to plan for water play. (We enjoyed the ducks and pelicans that gather here, and spent as much time on the sand by the river as in the playground itself.)

Playing dress-ups in the water!

Inspired by her two young girls who love to swim, Sydney mum, Heidi Wallis, who has over 20 years experience designing swimwear for Italian and Australian companies, launched **Bluesalt Beachwear** last year, featuring eye-catching Mermaid and Pirate prints for kids in fine, chlorine-resistant, SPF50+ UV-rated fabric.

Heidi says her Bluesalt designs let children enjoy the fun of 'dress-ups' for swimming, in beachwear that's not only colourful and cute, but also safe. The quick-dry fabric is perfect for all ages of water babies, protecting delicate skin while also retaining vibrant colours and shape.

The range includes rashies and wetsuits, and Bluesalt's float suits, with special buoyancy panels, designed to help little ones learn to swim, with full Australian Standards® accreditation. Bluesalt's new season range for the coming summer includes new styles and an expanded choice of sun protective swimwear and towelling cover-ups – and don't forget to grab a matching swim cap! bluesaltbeachwear.com.au



Tot-al travel comfort!



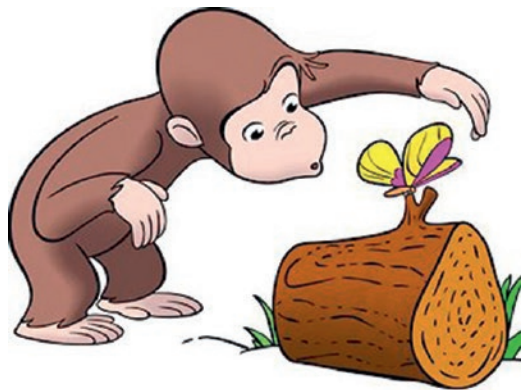
The brainchild of two Californian mums, who had both flown extensively with their small children, the Fly-Tot evolved out of a desire to create a portable, easy-to-use solution that would help to make inflight travel a little more comfortable for tots. The Fly-Tot is an inflatable cushion that allows your little ones to lay down flat on a regular, economy seat.

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RRP:
\$120.00
flytot.com.au

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Celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Curious George with two new-release DVDs guaranteed to delight little fans of this lovable, cheeky monkey! *Curious George: The Complete 8th Season* and *Curious George: Fun with Friends* showcase the fun antics of George, whether he's flying high above the clouds, splashing into his next unknown escapade or landing in another sticky situation. His inquisitiveness never fails to lead him, and young viewers, on many fun and curious learning adventures.



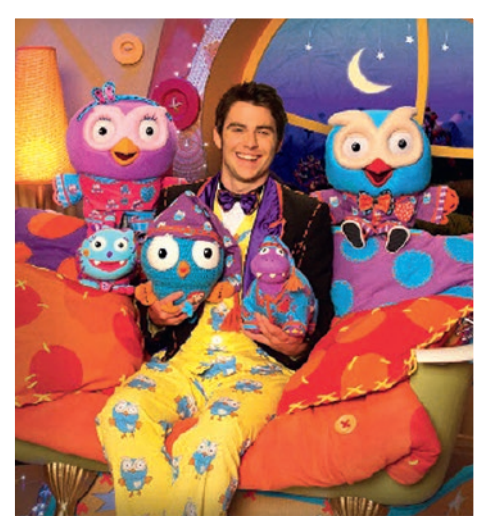
Live – Giggle and Hoot's Magical Christmas!

Jimmy Giggle and Hoot, from the much loved ABC4Kids preschool program, are coming to a stage near you this December, in a musical spectacular that sees the lovable duo enlist the assistance of their Owl Pal friends to help save Christmas.

In the land of GIGGLE AND HOOT everybody is busy getting ready for the arrival of Hootoclaws, for his special Christmas Night Watch. Trees are being decorated, presents are being wrapped, and all that is left to be done is to 'twinklify' the very dark night sky... but what happens when all the stars suddenly disappear?

Join Jimmy Giggle, Hoot, Hootabelle, Gigglefangs, Pirate Hootbeard and, of course, Hootoclaws and his dancing Elves, for this fun, festive frolic live on stage!

For complete tour and ticketing details, visit: abc.net.au/abcevents and livenation.com.au.



Sleepy-byes for babies in the skies

How do you get a baby to sleep on an airplane? Having to make multiple long haul trips between Australia and the UK with her baby prompted Fly Babee's creator to practically address the issues – overhead lights and assorted cabin distractions – that make it hard to get bubs off to sleep on flights. Fly Babee Sleep Easy cover is a 100% breathable blackout pop-up canopy that simply clips onto any airline bassinet and blocks out 97% of light and movement, for a cosy, distraction-free environment when it's baby's much-needed sleep time.

RRP: \$99.95

flybabee.com.au



Baby On Board

see Europe by train

Fearless adventurer and mum, **SUE WHITE**, recently travelled through Europe with her 10-month-old son, Ollie, and having done her homework first, advises families who plan to do the same to ... take the train! Here's why ...

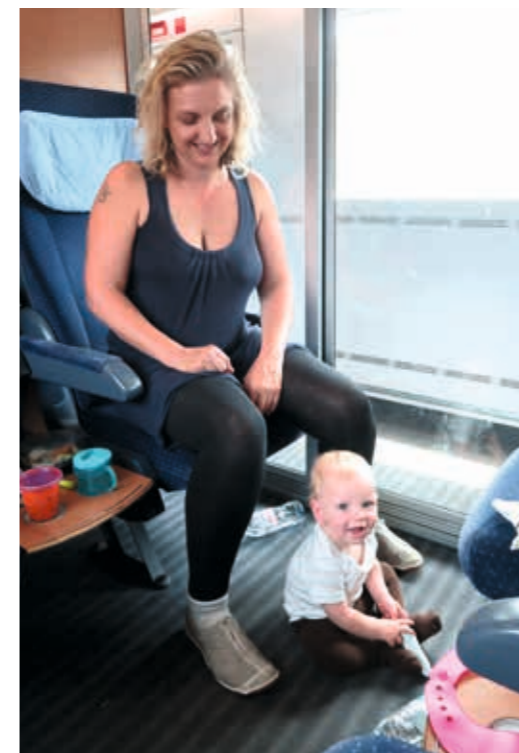
One of the many wonderful things for Aussies visiting Europe is that, once there, everything feels so close. But how best to make the 'hop' between cities or countries with a baby onboard? Train, of course.

It's not hard to see why. With plane travel you can often be met with long transfers to the airport, fiddly check ins, seat belt signs, sore ears and luggage carousels. And train travel? Departures and arrivals from the centre of town, no lines if you've got a Eurail pass, space for the baby to play while you enjoy the view, and luggage is within arm's reach.

No prizes for guessing which feels less frazzling. However, these are my first-hand tips for helping your European rail journey with little ones run smoothly.

1. Book everything in advance

The first is to book in advance. It's easy to think, "I'm in Europe, there are so many trains", but that's the wrong approach, at least if you're travelling between countries or on the high-speed intercity trains, especially in peak season. If you're travelling with a baby, you're not going to be flexible about days and times. Instead, you'll want train departures to coincide with accommodation check out times (you are pre-booking accommodation, right?). Plus, many intercountry tickets are much cheaper when booked ahead. Some high-speed intercity or intercountry trains require seat reservations: this means even if you're using a Eurail pass (see below) you'll still need to secure the actual seat on a specific departure.



2. Get the right Eurail passes

Around for decades, Eurail passes are still going strong. But before you buy, you'll need to sit down and calculate what the best pass is for you. Will you be in one, two or more countries? Which countries? (If they are adjoining countries, a Eurail Select Pass might be the best value). Will you be doing lots of daytrips (where you can make good use of an unlimited "Global" pass) or only using the Eurail pass for long distances? (In the latter situation a flexible pass offering five days in a month might be best.) If you'll be mainly in one country, a train pass might be the best value. Rail Europe sells passes and has loads of information (and forums) helping travellers choose the best pass for their trip. raileurope.com.au

You may find in some cases buying individual tickets works out cheaper: the only way to figure it out is to spend time crunching the numbers online.

A word about seat reservations ...

If you're travelling on a pass – like a Eurail, or a country-specific train pass – the idea of seat reservations may feel redundant. Don't you already have a pass? Yes, but this gives you 'access', versus an exact seat. Some journeys require either a rail pass + seat reservation (or simply, a firm ticket), whereas for other routes, seat reservations aren't necessary. It's because when criss-crossing Europe you are switching between both train companies and countries: each with their own requirements. As a general rule, if you're travelling in peak or travelling with a baby on a set schedule (ie: it will be a real hassle if your preferred train is full), make seat reservations as a matter of course.

A website like Seat 61 can be helpful explaining the ins and outs. seat61.com

Opposite:
XXXXXX
© SXXXXX



3. What to expect from onboard facilities

Once on European trains, bub can move around; there's always a decent café selling meals (or if you're in first class, meals are often provided – as is WiFi); and you can usually set up the pram somewhere at the end of the carriage for the baby's sleep while you sit and watch the view.

Most trains also have a baby change room, and if you're travelling in Switzerland, don't miss the 'family carriage'. Not only does it have loads of space downstairs perfect for prams, but upstairs is a playground. Yes, a playground on a train! Travelling babies' utopia.

4. Travelling by Eurostar

This high-speed train whips passengers from London to Paris in just over two hours. Everything about the experience feels easy; in fact, so easy it's joyful. At St Pancras station in London, you'll go through customs – simultaneously checking out of the UK and into France. The quick and painless process couldn't be further from an airport experience. There are lifts in St Pancras station, and plenty of place for luggage on board. (In theory there are limits, but in reality just load it on and you'll have no problems.) There's also a baby change room on the Eurostar. Tickets are cheapest purchased in advance (you can't use your Eurail on the Eurostar, but it may entitle you to a discounted ticket).

5. ... speaking of luggage ...

Trains allow more flexibility with luggage than planes, but you'll still want to pack smart for your European jaunt.

The best combination for travelling with a baby in Europe by planes or trains is:

A four-wheeled (not two-wheeled) suitcase - shared

between one adult and the baby. Put everything in tough zippered bags (like those from Kathmandu). Even better, label each with a key ring - Pants, Tops, Personal is a good division. Use additional zippered bags for toiletries (shared between adult and baby), a 'roaming' nappy change bag and a bigger zip bag for books and toys (keep the last two in your hand luggage).

A rolling backpack - as your carry on luggage – use this on flights and in transit days on trains (not a handbag).

A baby carrier – I found the Ergo to be the most comfortable.

Use the outside zip pocket as your handbag when out exploring – let's face it, you're not going to be looking super stylish with a baby strapped to you anyway, so go for practical!

A pram - if your baby has day sleeps in it.

For more travelling-with-baby tips, take it from a mum who travels with baby – Sue White - and visit babieswhotravel.com



Travel buddies



Plus one

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR SOLO PARENTS ON THE ROAD WITH THEIR MINI TRAVELLERS »





“

Every parent knows travel days can be long when the kids leap up the minute the sun peeks through a hotel window. But they're even longer when you're the only adult in the room.

It's a feeling I know well. Since becoming a solo parent, I've remained determined to bring my son on my regular adventures. In return, others have been equally determined to tell me that I'm bonkers.

I've ignored them, and as a result my son, now four, has visited half of Australia's states and territories, and 10 countries before hitting preschool. When he was a baby we jaunted around Europe; in toddlerhood

we splashed in the clear waters of Noosa and made sandcastles in the Whitsundays; and last year he was doted on by Fiji's kid-loving locals before taste-testing his way through the tropical fruits of Vietnam.

No longer the loneliest number

Travelling solo with a child may sound like it's not for the faint-hearted, but it's a growing trend. Solo parents make up more than 15 per cent of Australian families, a fact the travel industry is starting to wake up to. In response, Intrepid Travel has introduced half a dozen tours designed for solo parents and their children.

Sarah Thomas, solo parent to nine-year-old Griffin, took her son to

It was the most relaxing and interesting holiday we'd managed to have together

Vietnam on an Intrepid Family Holiday last year. The group experience solved many of her challenges, providing kids to play with, adults to talk

to and taking the logistics out of Sarah's hands.

“It was the most relaxing and interesting holiday we'd managed to have together and it »





restored my faith that my travelling days are not over until Griff has grown up," Sarah says. But while the families were like-minded, she did find one problem.

"I felt a little out of place among all the couples. I think the Solo Parent option will be fantastic," she says. Tours start this month.

For solo parents travelling under their own steam, a few tips will exponentially improve the family travel experience.

Plan hard, travel easy

If you're new to solo parent travel, choose a famously kid-friendly location (Fiji and Bali are good short-hop options) or an "easy" city such as Singapore (the most kid-friendly city in Asia) to stretch your travel legs.

Next, put extra thought into the logistics. I quickly learned that convenience is king, and worth paying for. On an upcoming trip to Singapore, I've booked a hotel that's a strategic 180m from a metro train line. As a solo parent, I



Play it safe around water. BELOW: Intrepid's Solo Parent trips visit destinations such as Thailand.

“

I quickly learned that convenience is king, and worth paying for

also take taxis more often; the goal is to make transit and transfers as seamless as possible.

Itineraries too, need consideration. What can seem restful with two adults can be hard work with one. While all parents are on high alert with a toddler around a pool, try it solo for hours in a location with no pool fence.

When I'm alone, we take regular breaks away from the water where I can dial my parenting alert down a notch from 'super vigilant' and, given there's only one pair of eyes, I always take a swim vest for their protection.

Pack light (yes, really)

As a solo parent, packing lightly pays off. The 'hands free' state gained with a backpack often beats a suitcase, while it's worth being discerning with gear such as prams

and travel cots.

"My advice is to buy the best travel products available," says Bevin Aston, who has travelled solo with her son on many occasions, including for three months around Europe. "Not only are they easiest to travel with but they also retain their value when reselling," she says.

For my part, I'm generally happy to replace extra clothing with things that will help keep my son entertained. I never skimp on books and toys for flights, transits or downtime. On longer trips I top up locally: during a month in Hoi An we bought big toy trucks from the local market then donated them to a local orphanage when we left. »





TOP OF PAGE: The writer's adventures with her son.
BELOW: Take time to soak up the sights in places such as Tokyo.



accommodation offering a sense of connection – a balcony where you can watch the world go

by does wonders when you have limited freedom to nip out for an evening walk.

I do, however fall into one trap that Leah Smileski,

who regularly travels solo with her kids, warns against.

“I’ve been guilty of staying up late to recoup ‘me’ time on many of our adventures. But it leaves me tired the following day when my kids wake up with the sun, so when travelling solo I go to sleep an hour or two after them,” she says.

Leah wisely factors in break days where the childcare is low key.

“Every four or five days we take everything slowly and don’t plan anything. In Tokyo we spent a day roaming Shinjuku, stopping in toy stores, eating at will and taking our time in cafés. We had no agenda and even returned to our hotel early with snacks to watch Japanese game shows and lounge around,” she says. ✈

Sue White is a journalist, travel writer and founder of free Facebook group Kids Who Travel.



While all parents crave downtime, it's likely none do more so than the travelling solo parent

Research local playgroups or kids’ activities in advance, not just for them, but for you. In Hô An in Vietnam, we found two great cafés with playgrounds attached. My son played while I read my book nearby or chatted with other parents.

The social side of your accommodation choice is also worth some forethought. Resorts are hit and miss in terms of being sociable, but often have the advantage of kids’ clubs and nannies. Family-friendly youth hostels won’t have built-in childcare, but they can be social — book a

private room and use the communal kitchens and lounge areas to meet people. If you’re booking an Airbnb, consider renting a private room in a family home rather than renting the whole place for yourself.

Finding downtime

While all parents crave downtime, it’s likely none do more so than the travelling solo parent. Days are long, so it’s tempting to use the evenings to recoup a sense of self. I often hire a babysitter when my son is asleep to go exploring when he won’t miss me, and I love

How to stay social
Kids love being around other kids, while adults love, well, the occasional conversation with someone whose age has hit double digits. Travelling with other families is an excellent solution for solo parents, but failing that, try to build some deliberate socialising into your itinerary.





Toddler Travel

WITH SUE WHITE

Thinking of heading off on a travel adventure with your toddler? Our NEW regular column has you covered!



Meet Sue White

- journalist, travel writer, founder of babieswhotravel.com and mum to Ollie, an energetic, well-travelled, toddler. She's also the moderator of a Facebook community where travel-keen parents talk tips and tricks for family travel - all welcome!
[facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel](https://www.facebook.com/groups/KidsWhoTravel)

Ahh, toddlers: those walking (okay – running!), pointing, smiling, self-determined entities that keep us on our toes regardless of location ...

The myriad contradictions that make toddlers simultaneously charming and challenging bring a few new considerations for parents. How do you travel with a 15 month old who is determined to be independent, yet has little idea that running onto a busy road isn't safe? Or a two year old who, on one hand, will easily be entertained by an ant or a bee for ten minutes at a time, but who won't sit still for the duration of a ninety-minute flight?

Welcome to our new Toddler Travel column! Each issue, we'll tackle a different aspect of holidaying with your energetic, entertaining and exuberant one to three (ish) year olds.

Every child's developmental milestones (and temperament) is unique, but our age groupings will help to you loosely predict where the wins, challenges and memorable moments will come from on your next holiday with a toddler.



One to two year olds

Your travelling tot:

Within these ages your child will likely begin walking, soon followed by (for better or worse) running! Great for them, but a busy time for their adult travel companions. Be ready to spend your energy trying to entice your toddler back to your preferred location – multiple times! (No different to at home, right?) Remember, kids fly for free before age two, so this is a great time to get out there and travel.

Wins on the road:

Good news! At this age your toddler is still easy to distract. Turn their attention to a passing bird, answer enthusiastically as they point at everything from buses to cars ("Yes! That's a blue van!"), and they will quickly be pulled out of a funk.

Have some strategies for:

- 1** Child-proofing your accommodation. Your child's 'safety inspector' radar is evident; they'll sniff out power points and scale tables and chairs within seconds. Keep your eyes peeled!
- 2** Being extra vigilant around road safety. In early toddlerhood children still delight in running onto roads without warning.
- 3** Getting through plane rides. Toddlers are notoriously bad at sitting still for long periods. Take toys, books, and be ready to wander the aisle for most of the flight to keep your one to two year old entertained.

Try this:

Beaches and parks are superb additions to a holiday itinerary. Just be prepared that every visit to a beach, regardless of the weather, will result in everyone getting wet – toddlers of this age don't generally respond well to, "No, we're not swimming now". Equally unpopular: "Sorry, home time!"

Two to three year olds

Your travelling tot:

Your toddler has now truly left babyhood: he or she is falling over less and communicating more (the latter is very handy when travelling – they can now let you know, with words, what they need/want).



Wins on the road:

The downside of having to pay for your toddler on planes once they are two is balanced out by one thing: they now have their own seat, potentially making flights slightly more comfortable for you.

Have some strategies for:

- 1** The optimum toys to take. Mostly you'll want small and light, but consider taking a trike, bike or a scooter. If it's easy to assemble it may even be worth dismantling one to pack for a flight, or pick one up cheaply when you reach your destination and leave it behind if necessary.
- 2** Helping them settle quickly into a new environment. Favourite doll? Blankie? This week's high rotation books? All worth their weight in gold.
- 3** Keeping that precious day sleep while you're on holidays (unless you want life at home to be vastly altered on your return).

Try this:

Local playgrounds are a hit with two to three year olds. Do some research and you might even find some with a local twist: the Dutch have community-run playgrounds called *Kinderboerterij*, where pigs, chickens and rabbits roam – great free entertainment!

Three years old +

Your travelling tot:

In some people's minds, three year olds are 'kids', not toddlers. But at the early end of this bracket you might still be working around nappies, toilet training (tip: *don't* coincide this with a holiday)

and the last remnants of that precious day nap.

Wins on the road:

By now, most parents have likely abandoned their aversion to toddler screen time – at least on long trips or planes. This makes transit easier, but remember, audio books are great too.

Have some strategies for:

- 1** Resorts' kids clubs and cruises if your child is still in nappies. Double check when booking that they can use the kids club (resorts) or swimming pool (on a cruise) if not fully toilet trained. Once they are, consider travelling with a plastic under sheet for night time accidents.
- 2** Sleeping. If they're already sleeping in a 'big bed' without side rails at home, great. If not, buy a purpose-built product to take (Shrinks sells an inflatable side rail) or consider a mattress on the floor.
- 3** Food on the road. When a toddler needs food it's usually "NOW!" versus when it's convenient. Take snacks, always.

Try this:

Three year olds can usually do well on short walks, especially if they've become used to this at home. You'll still want to take something to carry them in when they fade (an umbrella stroller would work for paved paths, otherwise consider a baby backpack – just check your child isn't too heavy for it). While you'll need to scale back length of hikes and bush walks now, train up the kids at this age and it will pay off within a year or so!

Mountain Buggy juno - a 'hip-healthy' carrier



The Mountain Buggy juno is the first multi-functional carrier that transitions seamlessly from newborn to toddler, providing a hands free, hands through connection. The juno was developed in collaboration with medical professionals to deliver the very best ergonomics for both child and adult, in all four carrying modes, and recently received news that the International Hip Dysplasia Institute has endorsed the Mountain Buggy juno carrier as a 'hip-healthy product', when used as directed.

And, of course, the hard working Mountain Buggy product design and marketing teams are proud as punch to be acknowledged by the International Institute for such conscientious attention to safe positioning in all four carrying modes!

Mountain Buggy juno is available through Baby Bunting.

Visit babybunting.com.au

Get involved with Australia's fantastic community Playgroups!

Today, across Australia, over 8,000 community Playgroups meet each week in church halls, public parks, local government buildings and wherever else a venue can be found, and every week 200,000 parents and carers organise, voluntarily participate in, and fund or partially fund, their own community Playgroup.

Community Playgroups help your child prepare for early learning and school, and support you as a parent or carer.

Did you know ...?

- Children who did not attend playgroups were twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable at school entry than those who did.
Telethon Kids Institute Research 2016
- Community Playgroups are in 80% of postcodes in Australia.
Playgroup Australia 2016
- Community Playgroups connect parents and carers with others in their community and help families settle into new communities.
RMIT research 2016
- Playgroups are universally beneficial for children from a range of different backgrounds.
Telethon Kids Institute Research 2016

Find your nearest community playgroup by accessing your State or Territory Playgroup Organisations' **Find a Playgroup Page**
@ playgroupaustralia.org.au/Our-Members.aspx or call 1800 171 882.



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FAMILY

MONKEY FOREST

WILD AND

FREE

—Think Ubud is just for yogis and soul searchers? Think again. This Balinese town surrounded by serene rice terraces and lush forest may be the island's spiritual heart but it's also an unforgettable family paradise—

WORDS_SUE WHITE



CAMPUHAN RIDGE WALK



Get creative

ALL AGES

> Ubud doesn't have a lot of playgrounds but on the outskirts of town, it does have Yellow Coco Creative Nest, which hosts classes in puppetry and family acro yoga under a huge canvas tent. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, kids under four and their carers flock to the Early Years Creative Play group, where dance, stories and water play are all part of the mix. As this is in a quiet location, it can be worth getting your driver to wait.

fb.me/yellowcocoubud

Curl up with a book

AGES 2+

> Libraries don't typically attract tourists but Pondok Pekak Library & Learning Centre should. Just off Jalan Monkey Forest, this library and arts centre is home to over 30,000 books and an active cultural program. Kids can learn jewellery-making and gamelan (a musical ensemble) but the real gems are at the back of building, where hundreds of children's books provide a sanctuary from the busy streets of Ubud's centre.

fb.me/pondokpekak

Work on your kickflips

AGES 6+ (4-6 WITH SUPERVISION)

> Skateboarders of all ages will have a blast at Blue Bear Bali Skatepark, where group or private skating lessons provide a fun and active afternoon for everyone. Parents can join in and skate (or if they prefer to take it easy, there's great coffee on offer), while younger children play in the toy area. It's even a good opportunity for a dance – there's live music on Wednesdays and some Saturdays, as well as resident music days from 11am on Sundays. Rental gear is available.

bluebearbali.com/skatepark



SKATEBOARDERS AT BLUE BEAR

"CYCLE THROUGH QUIET VILLAGE STREETS, DENSE FORESTS WITH NARROW TRACKS AND PICTURESQUE RICE PADDIES."



GREENBIKE CYCLING TOUR

Cycle the back roads

AGES 2+

> Given that an active volcano looms about a 10-minute drive from where the GreenBike Cycling Tour begins, you might assume the biggest risk on a tour in the hills north of Ubud is an unexpected flow of lava. Apparently not. Mount Batur hasn't erupted for years; instead, it's humans who pose the greatest risk to families enjoying this 23-kilometre ride. Guides warn: "Watch for the village kids who want to high-five you. If it's hard, you might fall off." With younger kids nestled on the supplied child seat and tour guides taking up the front and rear, small groups cycle through quiet village streets, dense forests with narrow off-road tracks and picturesque rice paddies. It's hard to decide what's most satisfying – the relative serenity of Bali's back roads, the chance to spend an entire day surrounded by greenery or the fact that the whole thing is downhill.

greenbiketour.com

See shadow puppets

AGES 7+

> As Bali's cultural centre, Ubud abounds with dance performances – there's at least one show somewhere every evening. But venture to the back of the gallery space at Oka Kartini BnB on a Wednesday, Friday or Sunday night and it's shadow puppets entertaining the audience. Make no mistake, this is not an "easy" show but a traditional one, which will reward older children who can bear a slow start and appreciate the skill behind this traditional art form. The tiny performance area means you can stand to the side of the stage and watch the puppeteer and assistants at work – it's incredibly interesting.

balicultureworkshop.com

Do dinner and a movie

AGES 4+

> Like your cinema sustainable, thought-provoking and super comfortable? Ubud's unique Cinema Paradiso experience trumps Gold Class at home – not only can you have an organic, vegan meal delivered to your lounge during the show but the price of your movie ticket comes off the price of any food you order. Paradiso screens plenty of children's movies each week and this is a "shoes off" experience.

paradisoubud.com



Take a walk and admire the views

AGES 4+

> Wake the kids early and hike Campuhan Ridge before the heat hits. The two-kilometre (one-way) stretch isn't exactly undiscovered but it's still very peaceful. Walkers starting near the bridge on Jalan Raya Ubud (near the entry to the Warwick Ibah Luxury Villas and Spa) pass a large temple before the well-marked trail snakes past jungle-like scenery on both sides of the ridge. It can take more than two hours with a pre-schooler in tow but kids over six will handle this walk easily, especially if motivated by ice cream incentives (there are plenty of cafés at the end). The longer nine-kilometre loop is best avoided with young children.

Dive into the deep end

ALL AGES

> Parents who've spent much of the Campuhan Ridge walk lugging a small child will be feeling the heat. The cure? An afternoon at Jungle Fish. At this urbane pool bar attached to the upmarket Chapung Sebali resort, it's impossible not to decompress. Even the journey to get here is relaxing – the long winding roads leading to the hotel from Ubud's centre get quieter with every kilometre. Kids are welcome and the entry fee includes a towel.

chapung.com



BLUE BEAR BALI SKATEPARK

Tour a school with a difference

AGE 4+

> If the movie *Avatar* featured a school, it would look something like this. Set amongst lush forest about a 30-minute drive out of Ubud, Green School's wall-free bamboo classrooms are world-renowned. Daily guided tours of the wider campus are available (by booking online in advance only) and while it may seem a bit contrarian to spend school holidays in, well, a school, this feels more like a nature walk that also takes in the non-profit organisation's architecture and holistic teaching principles. The school is designed to be rugged so be prepared for a hike with steps, steep inclines and meandering paths down to the Ayung River. You might actually have trouble getting the kids to leave, especially once they discover the joys of hiding among the large bamboo "chimes" in the central building. Tour fees go towards supporting the school's Local Scholars Program. greenschool.org



A CLASS AT GREEN SCHOOL



INSIDE GREEN SCHOOL'S CENTRAL BUILDING



WHERE TO STAY

> Book an eco cottage at **Bali Swasti** (above; baliswasti.com), a short stroll from Ubud's famous (or infamous?) Monkey Forest, where parents can enjoy the daily yoga sessions while kids will love the circus classes and wandering the gardens. On the other side of town, **De Munut Balinese Resort** (demunutresort.com) is a well-priced and peaceful hotel with friendly staff, plenty of greenery and two pools.

WHERE TO EAT

> Kid-friendly dining is plentiful in Ubud but at **WAMM** (fb.me/whataboutmymother), the little ones can play on the soccer field outside or discover the toy corner under the stairs. **The Elephant restaurant** (elephantbali.com) is a favourite for vegetarian meals – and for the view over the Campuhan Ridge. The same owners also opened woodfired pizza joint Dumbo nearby. For dessert, try the coconut ice-cream at **Tukies Coconut Shop** (tukies-coconut-shop.business.site).

HOW TO GET AROUND

> Within Ubud, the streets can be busy. Footpaths are narrow and few areas are pram-friendly. Use taxis if you have young kids. **DMY Tour Bali** (fb.me/DMYtourtravel) takes visitors to Ubud from across Bali and have child seats. **Magical Bali Tours** (uniqubalitours.webs.com) offers family-friendly tours in the area, plus transfers.