

City Breaks

City breaks, or even longer holidays in cities, can be highly enjoyable for the whole family if planned carefully. In addition to 'typical' tourist attractions like museums, monuments and parks, it's worth bearing in mind that cities are also home to children and therefore will almost certainly have a wide range of facilities to offer your family. One of the key things we realised whilst researching this topic is that to make a city break a success, you may want to consider booking an apartment rather than a hotel as this really will give you maximum flexibility, especially when it comes to meal times and sharing rooms. Also, most cities and towns have websites now where you can do some research in advance and find out where all the parks and children's activities are before arriving.

There are frequent flights to European cities from most UK airports, especially Gatwick and Stanstead which makes life easier when getting there from Guernsey. Lower cost fares from 'no-frills' airlines can sometimes be a false economy and increase the stress of your break:

- 1) They often fly to smaller provincial airports as landing taxes are cheaper, which means that you may have to travel up to two hours to get to your City.
- 2) Take off times for Charter flights into Europe can be very early at about 5 or 6am, which for us means an overnight stay in UK before we've even gone anywhere.

Think carefully about the hassle involved with longer transfer time and early starts before opting for what once would have been, the cheaper alternative.

Once you are there most Cities have great public transport systems that your child will probably see as an adventure, but again plan in advance and understand how this all works so you can just get your tickets and go.

Try and limit your plans to a couple of attractions a day and combine a morning in a museum with an afternoon in a park. A good compromise - Consider combining a few days in a City with others visiting or staying at a theme park. Barcelona and Universal Mediterranean, Paris and Disneyland or even a weekend in Copenhagen with an afternoon spent at Tivoli are good examples.

Consider taking Condor Ferries to France if you are thinking of visiting Paris or Brussels (or even Bruges). It works out quicker and certainly less stressful than taking two flights from Guernsey, making the experience much more family friendly. One of our Guernseymums members recently took her 4 year old on a City break to Barcelona. Read about her experience in our [***Destination Section***](#) and maybe get some tips.



Long Haul Trips

If you plan to travel beyond Europe think about the length of the journey and jet-lag. Toddlers and young children can find long flights difficult and try our patience. Most scheduled airlines now offer specially prepared food and entertainment for children, which increasingly include dedicated seat-back TV programmes. It's worth enquiring exactly what the airline does offer before making a final choice. If you are travelling with an infant under the age of two they will travel free or nearly free. However, if the flight is full you will be expected to juggle them on your lap for hours. If your budget allows and you are travelling during a peak period then it is worth considering the purchase of a ticket that actually comes with a seat!

Jet-lag tends to affect people more when arriving from the West (i.e. on your way back from North America or on your way to Asia). If you are planning a trip to the East Coast of the United States, and your schedule allows, consider taking a day time flight home. These generally leave at 9 in the morning and arrive in the UK at 9 in the evening.

Think carefully about travelling long-haul with younger children for durations of less than 10 or 14 days. By the time the family has recovered from the effects of jet lag it can be nearly time to come home again. One Guernseymums member has submitted her story about her recent 3 week trip to New Zealand with her 4 and 1 ½ year olds - read about this and others in our [***Destination Section***](#)

Skiing

Family skiing holiday differs in many ways from a pre-family skiing holiday. There's a lot to think about and you'll need to prepare carefully to ensure it's a successful one. Yet, if you choose the holiday that's got the right level of support for your family then skiing holidays can rival any other kind of family break.

The most important considerations include whether and to what extent to opt for some kind of childcare, whether to use an agency and/or operator to help organise the holiday...and, if so, which one(s), what type of accommodation and resort to choose and what to take:

Childcare can take many forms including formal programmes and bringing a nanny, au pair or 'non-skier' friend or relative. Even if you're not a 'fan' of holidays with childcare you may find your holiday compromised for all concerned unless your kids are looked after to a degree. Important considerations include language skills of carers, timing and flexibility of care, ratios of carers to kids and reputation of the company providing care. Note that 'care' is often provided by a ski school which is generally independently run from the operator making your arrangements.



If you have a nanny or au pair accompanying you then make sure you can find things to do - resorts with pools and other activities, ideally within walking distance of where you're staying. Work out in advance what your mutual expectations of each other are so there are no unfortunate surprises.

Agencies and/or operators - you'd be very brave to make all arrangements completely independently for your first family ski trip, especially since a ski holiday is more complicated than other types of holiday. If you know a resort well and visit frequently you may find it more cost effective to make your own arrangements. Remember, though, that operators negotiate discounts for buying rooms, ski passes etc. in bulk and will generally pass on some of that saving. They'll also employ one or more reps at the resort whose job is to ensure your holiday runs smoothly.

Agencies can help you choose the right operator. Since they earn a commission from the operator you won't normally pay more for seeking their assistance. But make sure you opt for an agency with knowledgeable staff who invest the time and energy to really understand your requirements.

Numerous tour operators offer ski programmes, ranging from the larger mainstream companies like Thomson's to smaller ski specialists. Operators who are highly regarded for their focus on families include Mark Warner, Esprit, Powder Byrne, Club Med, Meriski, Scott Dunn, Ski Famille and Simply Ski. Type of accommodation Hotels can be more expensive, but offer service and, usually, more facilities than self-catering choices. Apartments offer the benefit of a kitchen and living room for the evenings, but you're even less likely to want to cook and clean after a day's skiing than a day on the beach.

Accommodation - Chalets vary substantially in size and quality. Generally, they'll accommodate 8-16 people (i.e. 2-4 families) and offer catering in the form of breakfast, dinner and 'afternoon' tea. Since you're not guaranteed to get on brilliantly with your fellow guests an option worth considering is to travel with friends and 'fill up' the whole chalet. Some chalets offer childcare in-house for younger kids and they may be equipped with toys and games.

Choice of resort - considerations here include transfer times from the airport (a long transfer can get a ski holiday off to an awful start), activities on offer in the resort like swimming pools, reputation of the resort's ski school and suitability of the slopes for the differing ability ranges of your family members.

Finally, don't be put off by the fact that there's a lot to think about. As long as you take the time to prepare properly your family can enjoy an amazing ski holiday.



Adventure

Adventure holidays mean different things to different people. Nowadays, your family can do the Pyramids and the Sphinx, lions and tigers, whales and dolphins and even bungee jumping and white water rafting (though maybe not with babies or toddlers), on every single continent.

You certainly need to spend more time preparing things to take and managing your children's expectations. Here are some things to think about:

Travelling with other families - most adventure holiday tour operators arrange these trips for small groups of 15-20 people, which means around 3-5 families. You'll need to be the kind of family that can get on with other families and do bear in mind that you'll share their company with few breaks for a week or two. You could, instead, dust off your old Lonely Planet and travel independently...but that probably won't suit most families.

Health and stamina - although the itineraries for family adventure holidays are less taxing than those catering just for adults, your family will need to be relatively fit and used to walking / excursions. Depending on where you travel you may also need a number of jabs beforehand. And you'll need to look after yourselves well in the heat. Hygiene standards may be lower than those to which you are accustomed. The combination of heat, physical exertion and poor hygiene can, minimally, require your family to take it easy for a day or two and opt out of planned excursions. Culture shock - depending on where you go it may take a while to adjust to your new surroundings. Locals may take a strong interest in your children, albeit normally friendly, and you and the kids could find that unsettling at first. Cities, while fascinating, can be very crowded and noisy.

Accommodation standards - don't expect luxury on these trips. But do expect clean and comfortable rooms. They're perfectly fine as long as you're not expecting to stay at the Ritz Carlton each night.

Camping

You may assume that the patter of little tiny feet means the end of camping trips. That does not have to be the case if you plan and have the right advice to ensure everyone enjoys the experience. The first time camping with kids can be a leap into the unknown, but it is great fun and an inexpensive/eco friendly way to have a holiday or weekend break. Once you've worked out what to pack and where to go it doesn't have to be a trauma either.



1. **Where to go?** Pick a campsite where there is room for your children to roam safely and that allows you to relax. Avoid campsites too close to rivers, roads or with cliff top views! If you are taking you children camping for the first time, pick a campsite you are already familiar with.

2. **Setting your expectations:** Remember children will probably find that the most exciting part of the trip is the novelty of sleeping in a tent, cooking outside and exploring the campsite. Make the most of it, you won't need to cram their days full with other activities to keep them amused.

3. **Timing:** Arrive at your campsite early so you have plenty of time to set up. Pitching a tent in the dark with kids can be hard work! Give the kids some jobs to both help you and keep them amused; passing the tent pegs, assembling the poles and unpacking their sleeping bags.

4. **Where to pitch:** The all important distance to the toilet block is key; try and get a pitch not too close - you don't want to be woken in the night by others, but not too far away so you avoid a full on trek to the loo. Also if possible pitch next to or near a marker of some sort to help your kids locate your tent from a distance e.g. a tree, telephone pole or fly a flag from the top of your tent (skull and cross bones might help avoid any neighbours pitching too close!).

5. **What clothing do they need:** Waterproofs jacket and trousers/all-in-ones + wellies/ walking boots really are a good idea for camping in the UK. If it starts to rain you don't want to be cooped up in the tent for hours with hyperactive children. Bring comfortable preferably quick drying clothing, fleece jumpers and trousers are brilliant. Also a head torch is a really good idea, helps them go to the loo in the dark, is harder for them to drop than a torch and can double up as a Harry Potter/Star Wars prop!

6. **How do I keep them warm at night:** This is important, as you are not going to be a "happy camper" if you have been woken at 2am by "Mummy I'm cold". Make sure their sleeping bag is suitable for camping, not just sleepovers at their friend's house. Look for good quality "mummy shaped" synthetic bags and give them an extra layer of fleece clothing if it is cold. A good sleeping mat is what really helps keep warmth in when camping, air beds are often used but actually they offer very little insulation compared to foam roll mats or more technical self-inflating, foam sleeping mats. Finally, if you are camping with small children it is a good idea to put them in between two adults to avoid them rolling off the sleeping mat on to the side of the tent and getting cold.



7. **Cleaning:** Take kids camping and one thing is guaranteed, they will get dirty. Firstly this is no big deal especially if you are only away for a couple of nights. If you are away for longer choose a site with shower facilities. Wherever you are babies and toddlers can be bathed in a plastic box with water heated from your stove.

8. **Organising the tent:** Organise the tent as much as possible and try to only bring what you need. Stuff bags are great storage solutions, they can be scrunched up when not in use and can be filled with clothing, sleeping bags and just about anything you can think of.

9. **Cooking:** keep it simple, easy to prepare food for the hungry family and plenty of snacks to keep energy levels up.

Of course the alternative to putting up your own pitch, is to go to a campsite that offers the tents all fully equipped, it can be just as fun and slightly less stressful. We are really lucky that we have our own campsite over in Herm where many a sunny day can be spent either in your own tent or one of the Islands tents. For more information on this check out the Herm Island website www.herm.com

