

mumsense

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making sense of family life

SILENT NIGHTS

Developing good sleep habits for your kids

SMOOTH AS A BABY'S BOTTOM

Skin care for children

PARTY BELLES

Make her the belle of the ball with the latest in holiday party wear

OH BROTHER!

Sibling Rivalry Revealed

TRULY GIFTED

Our holiday gift guide

Christmas is looming and I think the pressure gets to the best of us, so I've been thinking of ways to take the angst out of this festive season and instead make it a truly magical affair. Tell me; is there really anything more romantic than wrapping up and venturing out in search of traditional markets where you can sip mulled wine, taste cheeses (spiral lollypops for the kids) and pick up last-minute chic presents before returning to a chocolate-box cottage to roast chestnuts on the fire? I think not. So if you're looking for some more authentic family festivity, maybe you should think about a break in the stunning French countryside this December. France is virtually on our doorstep so it makes sense if you want to get away from it all, without going far. You can fly to one of the numerous local airports, take a leisurely ferry, or make the short Eurotunnel journey by car to Calais. This quick and pain-free crossing is ideal for all the family – including the dog if they have a passport!

I know many parents feel uneasy at the thought of road-trips with little ones, worrying that it will be all tears and tantrums, but I took my daughter on her first road tour of France at just eight-weeks-old and we haven't looked back. Trust me, with a bit of planning and a positive attitude; it can be a fun and relaxing experience. With all this in mind I have pulled together a few ideas and tips, which I hope will get you en-route to your perfect Christmas cottage break – Enjoy!



Travel Sense

Alice Griffin explores Yuletide 'en France'

Great Products



For a family road trip with a baby on board you might want to invest in this rather nifty car bottle and food warmer. When I was travelling with my newborn I had to rely on kind restaurants giving me bowls of hot water, or a flask with a time limit – this is far more practical! Code: A3112 - £8
www.jojomamanbebe.co.uk

Hanging around at airports can be boring for little people. Keep your toddlers happy with their very own Trunki Case – hand luggage approved. Available in pink and blue, children can ride-on, or when they get lazy you get to pull them along with the handy carry strap. Hours of fun! Age from 3yrs, Blue or Pink, Code: A6732 - £30
www.jojomamanbebe.co.uk



In-Car Entertainment
 When travelling in the car with my daughter I have found music indispensable. In particular she loves 100 Songs For Children. As soon as we put it on, she starts to smile, clap and sing-along so if you want a happy journey, add this to your packing list. Just remember not to play it for too long – in my experience husbands do seem to get fed up with singing Old McDonald. Bah humbug! £5.93
www.thehut.com



WHERE TO STAY

Tots to Travel source child-friendly properties across the UK, France and Italy (Spain, Portugal and Turkey coming soon) vetting them for baby-friendly items such as stairgates, electric socket covers, cots and enclosed play areas. As parents we all know what it's like to book a gorgeous self-catering cottage only to arrive and find it's on the edge of a cliff – beautiful sunsets I'm sure, but not conducive to a relaxing family break! By booking a property through Tots to Travel, you can rest easy knowing that another mum, just like you, has actually visited with children in mind.

Why not take the Eurotunnel or ferry followed by the relatively short drive to Alençon. Here, the beautiful former convent, La Maison Dieu, is nestled within spectacular grounds - perfect for hide and seek. If road trips aren't your thing you could fly to Montpellier for a luxurious stay at The Water Mill, complete with heated indoor swimming pool, enclosed adventure playground and a selection of toys provided. And of course, you won't be far from the famous Montpellier Christmas market where more than 200 wooden chalets line the pedestrianised Place de la Comedie, each selling great Christmas present ideas. (open from first week of December, until New Year)
 Find these and many more properties at www.totstotravel.co.uk