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Issue 35 Spring 2022



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If Wen



Brontë Bitch

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E4's Celebs Go Dating
relationship expert
Anna Williamson on
how to find or fix love
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Editor's letter



Photographer Simon Williams

With Spring in the air and pandemic restrictions lifted, people are ready to find love or fix relationships and strengthen family bonds. What better person to talk about love than E4's Celebs Go Dating relationship expert Anna Williamson. Her new book, 'Where Is The Love?' features tips for boosting confidence, building self-esteem, identifying and setting boundaries, tackling arguments, BABY-proofing relationships and all those tricky topics in between.

Music has been a life saviour during my long pandemic walks particularly the understated and introspective folk tunes by Barnes-based artist If Wen. I have caught up with him to chat about his charming and poetic songs. His first album was about love and rejection. The songs that are coming together for his second seem to be about survival and resilience.

To bring more smiles to your face, I interviewed successful mumpreneur Rosalia Ferrara, who has created her own fashion brand Brontë Bitch inspired by the Brontë sisters.

If the lack of sunshine makes you feel blue, it's probably time to escape. Welcome to London Mums' special Costa Rica Travel edition where you'll find out the best spots to tick all boxes in the bucket list of 'Things to do before you die' and top tips for travelling with a toddler.

I hope you will enjoy reading this Spring issue as much as the London Mums' team have loved making it!

Spread the word – joining London Mums is totally and utterly FREE!

Monica Costa

Editor in chief, Founder of London Mums & mum

of 15-year-old Diego monica@londonmums.org.uk, @londonmums

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THE BIG INTERVIEW



Anna Williamson

Editorial

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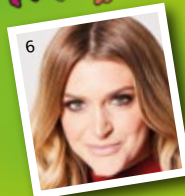
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Star mum!



E4's Celebs Go Dating relationship expert Anna Williamson on how to find or fix love and family bonds

By Monica Costa

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With Spring in the air and pandemic restrictions lifted, people are ready to date again. I recently met E4's Celebs Go Dating relationship expert, bestselling author, television, radio and podcast presenter Anna Williamson, to ask for her advice on relationships and general dating guidance.

She's launched her new book, 'Where Is The Love?' featuring tips for boosting confidence, building self-esteem, identifying and setting boundaries, tackling arguments, BABY-proofing your relationship and all those tricky topics in between.

Q: Home is

AW: Where the heart is. I know that sounds really cheesy and clichéd, but I really believe in that. Anyone can move into a house, but a home is about the people that make it full of love and a safe and warm place to be. My home is my safe space, my sanctuary, and the minute I walk through my front door I instantly feel grounded and content. I am a country girl at heart and I'm very lucky and proud to live in my little cottage, which is all higgledy-piggledy and very old, its 17th century, but it has the most beautiful warm soul. If walls could talk!

Q: What do you recommend to 40+ single mothers when it comes to going back to dating after many years of being just mums?

AW: The first thing is to work on yourself and really give yourself some TLC. I know myself being a mum that for some of the time it can feel like you lose yourself a bit, being a parent is just so full on and all consuming, you can't switch off, so if you wanted to get back into the world of dating it's very much something just for you. And it should be. So ask yourself what you want from the dating world, who you are looking for who has similar values and beliefs to you, and boost your self-esteem by knowing what a great catch you are.

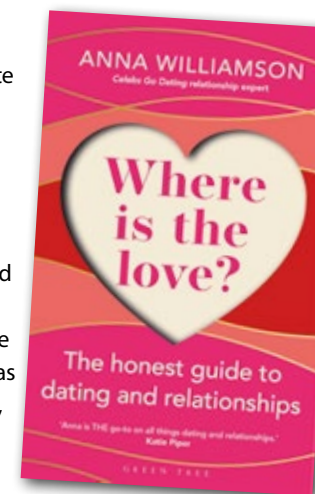
Q: What is love for you?

AW: Love is a feeling, but love is also a verb, a doing word. We can all trot out the phrase I love you, but it's in our actions that determines how much love we are showing. Romantic love is about intimacy, passion, and commitment.... If you focus on those three things, you will

absolutely give yourself the best chance of enjoying love in its truest form.

Q: You are a fantastic role model for women going through pregnancy. People don't often realise how tough it is to be a parent. What were your biggest surprises and challenges in becoming a new parent?

AW: Thank you that's very kind, being a parent is honestly the best thing I have ever done. It is certainly the most overwhelming and challenging role I have ever taken on, but it's by far the most rewarding and forever changing. The biggest surprise for me becoming a mum was how all-consuming it is, that might sound really stupid and obvious, but up until becoming a mother I was quite an independent soul, and the moment I became a mum I realised it was no longer solely about me anymore, and that definitely took me quite some time to get used to and adapt to. I'm delighted to say I'm there! I think we are always figuring out how to be a parent, and nobody ever nails it, I just make sure I do the best I can and as long as I give my children love, boundaries, and time, I feel I'm doing okay. ▶



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Anna at her book launch with some of the stars from *Celebs Go Dating*.

Q: What's your favourite part of London to go with the family and why?

AW: I adore London! I'm a country girl but equally I have a huge love for London as it is where I was born and where both sides of my family come from, I'm a North Londoner by heart. Until fairly recently I owned a little bachelorette pad in Angel and I absolutely adore that part of London. Islington is very much a second home for me, I love mooching around and grabbing a bite to eat. I also love walking along the Southbank by the Thames. That view will never get old.

Q: What are the biggest post pandemic challenges for parents and what can we all do to support our own mental health and our children/teenagers?

AW: Everybody has had it rough over the last couple of years during this pandemic, but I would go as far to say that parents have probably had it the roughest, looking out after our own mental health is one thing, but supporting our

children has been an even bigger challenge. We have all been working with the unknown and it's been a scary uncertain time. It's important coming through the pandemic to give some time to adjust to life changing yet again, hopefully going back to some sort of normality, but also respecting and understanding that that takes time and natural anxieties that have been present for months now can still be lingering. Keep reassuring each other, reassure your children that you are there for them, and operate an open door policy that they can come to you and talk to you about anything any time.

Q: Please tell me an anecdote about filming *Celebs Go Dating*...

AW: My co-host Paul C Brunson is one of the biggest pranksters ever. Only last week he snuck into my dressing room and let off the most repulsive fart spray which essentially cleared out a whole floor of our agency! It absolutely stunk and took a good day to fumigate.

Q: You have a new book baby

AW: *Where Is The Love? The Honest Guide to Dating and Relationships* is my fourth book baby, and I am incredibly proud of it. It is an honest upfront anecdotal self-help guide for everybody who is perhaps navigating the dating scene, or in a relationship and needing a little bit of help and understanding on how to make it better. We rarely know what goes on behind closed doors in relationships, and that's fair because they are intensely private, however being a dating and relationship coach, I know that many of us experience the same issues and challenges and there are actually a lot of things we can do to have a much healthier and happier relationship before we even remotely think about throwing in the towel. So, from learning how to argue effectively, to putting a spotlight back on your relationship if you have kids, to getting that passion back, I really have got an answer for it all.

Q: What else have you got coming up this year?

AW: It's going to be a busy year and I can't wait. My book has launched, *Celebs Go Dating* was great, and I'm about to go on tour with my podcast partner Luisa Zissman, for *LuAnna the tour 2022*. I also have my brand-new relationship coaching platform, *The Relationship Place* launching soon which is designed to provide practical help in video form for anybody wanting a bit of individual and couples coaching.

And hopefully I'll get a couple of nice holidays thrown in in between.

Where Is The Love? The Honest Guide To Dating And Relationships (Green Tree, £12.99) is out now.



Photo by Brett Cove



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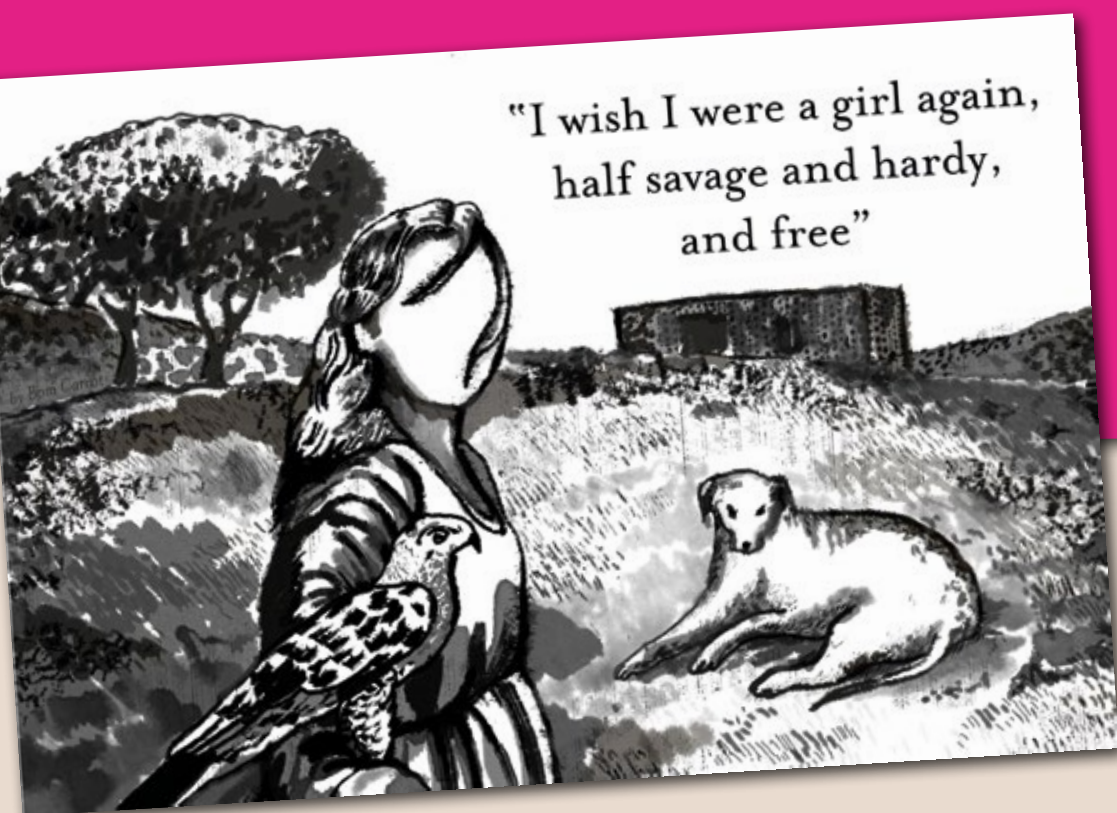
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Rosalia Ferrara is a fireball: she's a mum, a PR lady and now a successful entrepreneur with her own fashion brand inspired by the Brontë sisters. I have caught up with her to find out how she does it all.

Q: Where does the inspiration come from for Brontë Bitch?

RF: I'm inspired by the literary greats The Brontë Sisters and brother Branwell of Haworth where I actually live now. I moved to London in 1999 and returned back to my roots in 2014. How does the magic work? I come up with the concept, create a mood board, choose a designer, then they are tasked to illustrate my take on the Brontë story, the goal is to bring it back to life... so the first design is The Brontë Sisters featuring a quote from Jane Eyre. The second design is based on Emily Brontë and her love of animals, on the windy moors of Top Withens featuring a quote from Wuthering Heights. Branwell the brother is pictured with objects that narrate his story, although a very talented painter, poet, writer himself, his sad demise was of alcohol & opium addiction. In the third design Doodlher (<https://doodlher.com>) illustrates an array of goblets, books, laudanum, poppy flowers featuring quote 'Fortune, how fickle, and how vain thou art' – All the Brontë Bitch designs are unique, you will not find any

of them on the high street. My aim for this series is familiarity but with a cool edge.

Q: What is it that you like the most about the Brontë books/literature?

RF: The Brontë sisters wrote some of the best poems and novels in the history of English literature. They were trailblazers of their time, all exceptionally talented. I love that they still, after all this time, inspire people like myself to create. Fans travel far and wide to make the journey to Haworth, it's incredible to see, I guess sub-consciously reading the books living in the area made an impression on me, even as a child.

Q: What is the must sees in the 'Brontë region'?

RF: Well, you must visit the (1) The Brontë Parsonage museum (www.bronte.org.uk) the house where the family lived, played, created their imaginary world, and penned their famous poems and novels. (2) The Old School Room where the family all taught and where Charlotte was married. (3) The Parish Church where Reverend Patrick Bronte, father of Charlotte, Emily, Anne and Branwell, was the longest serving Vicar. The whole family are buried there apart from Anne who rests in Scarborough. (4) The famous cobbles on Main street, wonderful shops, country pubs, eateries,

Star Mumpreneur: How a Brontë Bitch is born

By Monica Costa

holiday cottages. (5) Brontë Falls and Top Withens on Brontë moors for the ultimate adventure. There's a lot to see and do for a small village, and if you have a car, there's much more in the surrounding areas.

Q: What are the family friendly activities in the Brontë countryside?

RF: For children it's the Keighley Worth Valley Railway station and trains home to many a famous film (<https://kwvr.co.uk/film/>). There are various child friendly weekenders usually around bank holidays and Christmas but best check the website for their announcements, coming up though is 1940s, Railway Children, Haworth Haddock, Workshops etc. Central Park is just around the corner before you get to Main Street, and The Parsonage Museum, and beyond to the moors and the rolling hills of Yorkshire... Make sure to pack your walking boots and waterproofs.

Q: How did you create the brand 'Brontë Bitch'?

RF: During lockdown 2020 I was searching for a funky and stylish Brontë Sisters t-shirt or tote bag online and I couldn't find any that were not blatantly copied! I had my eureka moment, I'll try and launch a brand selling t-shirts, totes so I did. Now available at my Etsy shop, you can find t-shirts, tote bags, tea towels and greeting cards so far. Readers, do have a look and support an independent small business. To create the Brontë Bitch logo I had lots of creative brainstorming, Brontë Bitch was suggested early on, but I thought it may be detrimental to the brand, I basically went full circle although I did also like Brontë Babe but that was taken.

The logo was created by my talented friend, Anna Cleary (<https://annacleary.co.uk>). She's an independent graphic designer from Utley, she thinks outside the box, and specialises in visual communication. Anna totally slayed it and in only one take: "A provocative

name requires a provocative logo," she said. "And I needed to soften the word 'bitch' somehow, hence the kisses. It's brave and it's sassy and I am a big fan of putting the cat amongst the pigeons!"

Q: What are the main challenges of a Mumpreneur/female entrepreneur?

RF: I guess it would be resources, time and a dedicated creative space. I would love a small studio set up where I am able to do everything myself. When you're passionate about something, it's so rewarding to see the idea come to life, it's a lot of work and most times you feel a frustrated lone ranger, flying your own tiny flag at the bottom of a mountain. On the flipside, I'm lucky to have supportive friends but I can't rely ►

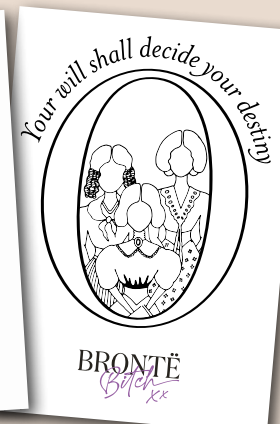




Image by lmaArtist from Pixabay



on their custom all the time. Lots of Haworth locals have also purchased my T-shirts, and the tote bags did well across the UK. A handful of tea-towels at my pop-ups before Xmas in Haworth and Todmorden, and several even went to the USA. The greeting cards and tea-towels can be framed as beautiful wall art, and are perfect gifts or treats for yourself. It's all affordable and one range is vegan and organic.

As a new entrepreneur, the icing on the cake is when new customers buy something from me and love it. This gives me reassurance that I am going in the right direction, and it's all worthwhile. I'd love for this to become my main business. I rely on the general public and media to find me and spread the word.

Brontë Bitch online shop on Etsy is
www.etsy.com/shop/BronteBitch/

Brontë Bitch will be at The Old School Room, Church Street, Haworth on 9-10 April, and at the Haworth 1940s Weekend in Central Park on 21-22 May. Please Follow: Brontë Bitch (without the i) on Facebook & Instagram for the latest news.



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Toby said: "We wanted our next product to be an essential problem solver. After extensive market research within the oral care industry, we discovered a major grey area, the problem of children not liking brushing their teeth and no real solution. Not only do parents find it hard to get their children to brush their teeth, they are not brushing their teeth properly."

Dr Ali Hussain, a fully qualified NHS and private dentist, said: "Wiggle from Whites Beaconsfield is a real game changer. This innovative product will truly revolutionise the way we get our children to brush their teeth. As a parent I know the stress of trying to encourage your little one to brush their teeth and this is the answer. Not only does Wiggle make teeth cleaning a fun activity it also cleans teeth more efficiently in a 360 degree way in just sixty seconds."

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At Mill Hill School NW7 Working Out behind the scenes

The people that power our gym!

By Chrissie Stevenson



Behind any small business is a team keeping the ship on course and here's who we have on board:

Adele, the captain of the ship, has worked in The Mill Hill School Foundation for over 14 years and under her leadership the business has seen enormous growth particularly in filming and partnerships with other local schools and businesses.

Chrissie (that's me) second in command. I have worked for the Foundation for 10 years and have grown our original gym into a fully functional space called The Mill. This was a lockdown project, and is my pride and joy. We are about to celebrate a year since opening. The school's strength and conditioning team benefit by having an excellent facility to train the teams and students and it's used by a number of elite sports clubs which truly validates of the quality of the installation. I am a personal trainer and spin instructor, currently on maternity leave with my second child.

Kelly joined us in 2019 as an administrator and is now a Manager, she helps keep the business running smoothly. A personal trainer and spin instructor she comes from an education background as a teaching assistant. Kelly also has the honour of being my sister. People will tell you not to work with your siblings or best friend but we work really well together, neither of us are afraid of telling each other what we think!

Jodie joined us from Camp Beaumont Mill Hill, she is currently covering the additional office tasks while I am on maternity leave. She runs our social media adding content and runs a dance fit class!

Our customer facing staff:

Stefano is our longest serving member, he teaches children with special needs and hails from Italy.

Hannah has been with us since she was 16, she is training to be a physiotherapist.

Hayley is also my sister and is a gifted seamstress.

Felix is a talented swimmer competing when at school, he is studying animation at University.



Chrissie



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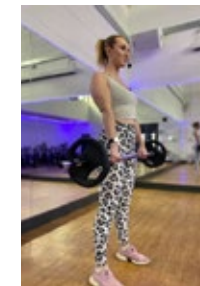
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New Music!

If Wen: Music to tune out of the mainstream

By Monica Costa



I met If Wen at Barnes Green last summer. He was singing understated and introspective folk tunes that resonated with me. Simply beautiful. It goes to show that you only need a guitar when the songs are good. He wants to be known with his artistic name If Wen.

Q: On your website's profile, you say that If Wen is 'a secretive singer songwriter who shuns publicity and records in the wilds of West Penwith in Cornwall'. Why secretive? And why Cornwall?

IW: I find I am quite sensitive to my surroundings and company. When I perform live I can easily be distracted, and I have tried recording in studios but never felt comfortable. I prefer taking a recording device somewhere remote and sitting with a guitar until I feel the right moment. The first album "Take a Look at the Sea" was recorded in a converted barn on a hill above Pendeen. It was so quiet I worked with the windows open and the birds singing along for company. The recordings for the second album have been in a house overlooking the bay at Sennen, in a cabin by the moor near Ding Dong mine, and at an artists retreat called Brisons Veor by the sea at Cape Cornwall. I find that the wildness of a gale, and rainbows that come so close you could almost touch them, bring out a creative flow. I think because my gran and mum lived in that county I learned as a boy how to find music in the wind and the seas. As regards to the word secretive, I am pretty shy and for years I only performed live under the name of Sid. But now I am happy to be known as If Wen, and that also hides my birth name, which is how I prefer it. The name "If" comes from a nickname and the "Wen" is from the Cornish for lower land. So it's If of the lower land, which for me would be the beach.

In my interview I tried to find out more about this mysteriously charming and poetic London singer songwriter who shuns publicity and records in the wilds of West Penwith in Cornwall. If Wen's first album was about love and rejection. The songs that are coming together for his second seem to be about survival and resilience.

Q: What inspires your music?

IW: Well it's full of references to the rhythm of the sea and winds and how they fit with the changeability of human passions. Let's say I have been through a few gales but biting rain can wash away tears, and a cloud can move off leaving the sun's rays to warm a battered heart. The song "Take a Look at the Sea" came to me one calm evening at sunset as I sat leaning against a rock. I can't tell you where because the surfer who mentioned the beach insisted I should always keep it quiet, and it still is quiet, apart from the music of the waves.

Q: How are your songs born? Please give me an example...

IW: They just pop into my mind and never when I want them to. I can go for years with nothing and then the lyrics and a tune arrive. I also find they have hidden meanings which make more sense later. The song "Nothing Means Nothing" appeared as I lay in the grass. It seems to be more relevant now than ever. The lyrics for "Eclipse Has Gone" came after I slept in a field by the village of Zennor where I watched a cloudy eclipse a few years earlier. I now realise it's all about moving on because once an eclipse is over the sun seems more beautiful than ever. ▶





Photography: Harriet Mercer www.harrietmercer.co.uk/

Q: You say that your songs are introspective and understated. Do they reflect your personality?

IW: Well I do prefer hiding away somewhere quiet rather than mixing in boisterous company. I used to try to make myself heard but always found it pretty exhausting. I guess it's the same with the songs. They seem to whisper rather than shout. And mellow is one of my favourite words. If they get close to mellow then I get a warm feeling.

Q: How important is music for you?

IW: I taught myself guitar after spending my first wage packets buying one. I took a guitar with me when I walked the coast path. And even when I leave it behind the music is still there in the sound of the wind in the trees, and in the song of a seal on a rock. I heard one singing away at the foot of a cliff on the Lizard.

Q: Any tips for fellow sing-song writers?

IW: Just wait and listen for what comes to you. For me the good ones arrive without any effort, and I thank the Good Lord every time. They genuinely feel like gifts and I am very grateful.

Q: You often play in the Barnes area where you live. How can local communities come together through music?

IW: I have a dream that one day all local councils might mark off performance spots in high streets and open spaces, so musicians, songwriters, poets and artists can meet up and perform whenever the weather is good. I sometimes play by myself sitting by the river or in Richmond Park but bye laws might be broken if an audience ever gathered. It would be great if the authorities encouraged more outdoor performances.



ADVENTURES AT HOME

40 Ways to Make Happy Family Memories

BY ZOË LAKE

All too often our family lives follow a similar routine day after day, week after week, so that it can all get a bit humdrum.



In *Adventures at Home* Zoë Lake shows how to bring entertainment and excitement into our lives with simple to follow, inspiring ideas for spending quality time with our young families, making fun and memorable days, and all in the comfort of our own homes.

How about letting them become a King or Queen for a day? Imagine they get to choose what they want to do, and as their subjects you obviously have to obey (safety allowing of course), or organise an Obstacle Course in the garden to wriggle, jump, crawl, hop around, or if the mood is a little low, what better than a bit of Disco Fever to make people happy again?

Make your own Bunting, Spend the Night Outdoors, Study the Night Sky, Have a Cream Tea Party,

Adventures at Home is packed with lots of inspiration for enjoyable things for families to do. Without the need to travel far or to spend money, no special equipment is needed; the book uses what you have around you. And you and your children end up with special memories to treasure for ever.



Adventures at Home is illustrated with vibrant photography throughout and will be published by Pimpernel Press in hardback on **10th March at £20.**



Travelling with children and essential holiday first aid advice

By Emma Hammett (First Aid for life)

Travelling with a baby or toddler for the first time can be a daunting and exhausting experience. Here are some top tips and practical advice to help smooth the way for a happy and healthy holiday.

Flying with little ones is the first challenge

Take small sachets of Paediatric Paracetamol or Ibuprofen in your hand luggage. These can help if the air pressure hurts their ears. Chewing, sipping water, or sucking on a dummy whilst taking off can also help relieve ear pressure. Pack favourite toys and books to keep them occupied during the journey and a special toy or blanket to encourage them to sleep.

Have a good supply of snacks in case the plane food doesn't take their fancy.

Take a change of clothes for your child and for you. Plus some additional layers. Planes can be quite cold, always adjust the air-conditioning to avoid it blowing directly onto them and take an extra jacket and socks.

Flying with babies

If permitted, take your buggy as far as the departure gate. A baby sling can be helpful as often your buggy is not returned until baggage reclaim.

Get to the airport in good time as you may be allocated specific seats at the front, with more space, if you are travelling with babies; bassinets are generally available for babies up to 2 years.

It is usually possible to pre-order baby food and ready to drink formula through Boots airside. Ensure you take enough for the flight and to acclimatise once abroad (order at least 7 days prior to departure).

In hot climates

Think carefully when packing to ensure you have suitable clothes to allow your body to breathe.

Pack travel blackout blinds and sunshades.

Wounds

In hot areas with high humidity, wounds often take longer to heal and easily become infected – ensure that any injury is cleaned thoroughly and apply a sterile breathable dressing.

Rabies

If anyone is bitten or licked by an animal, it is imperative that you seek medical attention as soon as possible and receive prompt anti-rabies treatment. If you are going to a high-risk area it is highly recommended to have anti rabies vaccinations in advance. Even if you have these vaccinations you still need urgent medical attention – but it does buy you a bit more time and means you need less invasive treatment should you be at risk. Rabies has 100% mortality and is not a nice way to go, so please treat it seriously.

Dehydration, sunburn and heat exhaustion

Keeping everyone well hydrated is particularly important in hot climates. Treat the sun with respect; cover up with hats, sunglasses and sun cream, drink plenty and keep out of the midday sun. If you are swimming or sailing remember that reflections from water increase the potency of the sun and regularly apply additional sunscreen accordingly.



If someone shows signs of heat exhaustion; flushed, sweaty, stomach cramps, headaches ... encourage them to sit in the shade and drink to replace their fluids. Seek medical advice if concerned.

Research in advance about specific dangers in the areas you are visiting learn how particular stings, bites, illnesses or reactions should be treated if affected. Choose a child friendly mosquito repellent and wear long, loose clothing to avoid being bitten. Be particularly careful at dusk.

Think ahead:

Always travel with toilet roll, tissues, hand sanitizer and a compact, sensible First Aid kit.

Accidents and illnesses can happen anywhere and can be more stressful when away from home. Equipping yourself with an appropriately stocked First Aid kit and the knowledge to help, means you are ready for action if something happens.

Here are my top tips for essential travel kits and medication:

1. Paediatric Paracetamol or Ibuprofen sachets – to have on the plane in case the air pressure hurts their ears and superb painkillers to have to hand anyway.
2. Paediatric Piriton (or alternative antihistamine) – in case they have a mild allergic reaction to new foods, stings etc...
3. A couple of calico triangular bandages; superb versatile sterile non-fluffy material, ideal to stop bleeding, easy cover for head wounds, elbows, knees, mouths – pretty much anywhere and can be folded to make a flat supportive bandage or used for a sling.
4. An instant ice pack – can be activated when you need it (without a freezer). Wrap and then apply to a bump or bruise to reduce swelling.
5. Non-adherent dressings for grazes and micropore tape to secure them to the wound. A couple of finger bandages and small bandage-style dressings are useful too.

6. Burn Gel – use after cooling a burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes, or helpful if burnt when there is no running water available, also great for sunburn.
7. Tough cut scissors to cut off clothes and good quality tweezers to remove a splinter or sea urchin spines.
8. Plasters – for short term covering of a wound. Remove as soon as possible, clean and then cover with an appropriate dressing, as plasters can lead to wounds becoming soggy.
9. Sterile wipes to clean a wound or pods of saline and some gauze squares – the saline is also useful to irrigate sand out of eyes.
10. Small crepe bandage to provide a support bandage for an injured limb.

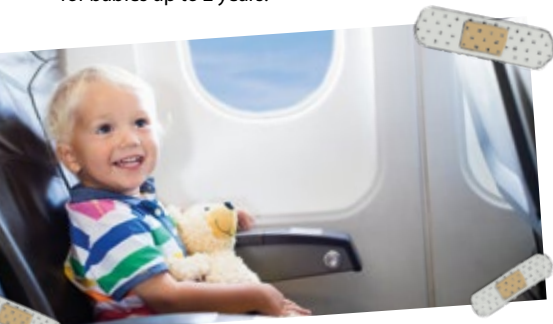
Ensure you have the number for the emergency services – throughout Europe the emergency number is 112 (elsewhere you should Google in advance or check in your guidebook)

Add additional First Aid items relevant to your trip and attend a First Aid course tailored to the particular needs of your holiday and family.

More details about what to put in your First Aid kit and pictures of the individual items can be found on our website www.firstaidforlife.org.uk

Attend a practical or online First Aid course relevant to the particular needs of your holiday and family. First Aid for Life will arrange a tailored family holiday first aid course specific to the area you are visiting, planned activities and needs of your family.

First Aid for Life provides this information for guidance and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice. First Aid for Life is not responsible or liable for any diagnosis made, or actions taken based on this information. It is strongly advised that you attend a practical First Aid course to understand what to do in a medical emergency.



--- Travel ---

Adventurous Costa Rica



Pura Vida

Get used to greet everyone with 'Pura Vida' instead of hallo. It literally means 'Pure Life' and represents the Tico mantra for a life lived with joy, authenticity and pride.

Relaxing on the beach watching the most spectacular sunsets is one of those Pura Vida moments. In Santa Teresa Beach, be prepared to share that moment with lots of surfers.

Waterfalls

One of the things in my bucket list was swimming under a waterfall. In Costa Rica there are some of the most spectacular and swimmable waterfall spots in the world.

Under the waterfall wrapped in water I closed my eyes to feel in tune with my surrounding in front of the powerful force of nature. Intense. Magical. Memorable.

Whale's Tail

Uvita is a quieter off the beaten path beach town, ideal for long walks on the uncrowded and huge beach. Situated on the Southern Pacific coast, Uvita borders the Marino Ballena National Park. The beautiful golden sands and swaying palm trees feature tropical rain forest right up to the sand. On the same whale watching tour, we made a stop at the Cano Island for snorkelling.

I took a long walk to The Whale's Tail, which is a naturally formed sand and rock spit extending over a mile and a half of the Uvita beach. During low tide, I managed to walk out on the actual strip that from above looks like a Whale's Tail.

Whale Watching

I headed to Uvita to the Marino Ballena National Park for the breath-taking whale watching experience with whales and dolphins swimming before your very own eyes. Humpback whales pass by through Costa Rica officially between December and March and July to December. Uvita, a small beach town in the South Pacific coast is the only place that has a great abundance of humpback whales during both times of the year. Costa Rica has the longest humpback whale season in the world!

It's common to see mum and baby whales together as this is the time where mothers nurse their young and teach them how to breach, dive and feed. A few days before I arrived, my friends saw the babies splashing their fins around and eagerly jumping out to practice. I saw a group of males showing their fins. During the tour lots of dolphins were swimming next to our boats. It was very emotional. I shed a few tears of joy. I love the fact that Costa Rica doesn't allow swimming with dolphins or whales. The tour costs between \$45 and \$75 USD and lasts 5 hours. Be prepared to negotiate the best rate. The experience is priceless, though.



In search of replenishment **Monica Costa** ticks lots of boxes in her bucket list of 'Things to do before you die'

2022 marks the end of my staycation after two years of pandemic. Costa Rica has been one of the first countries to open up again so I took my first big trip outside Europe in years. And what a trip that was. Costa Rica is a little country in Central America that contains a world's worth of landscapes, adventures and exotic wildlife

of all kinds. After spending two weeks travelling around the country by public transport and taxis, I have concluded that it's never enough time to experience everything Costa Rica has to offer. It's also the place I ticked lots of boxes in my bucket list of 'Things to do before I die'.

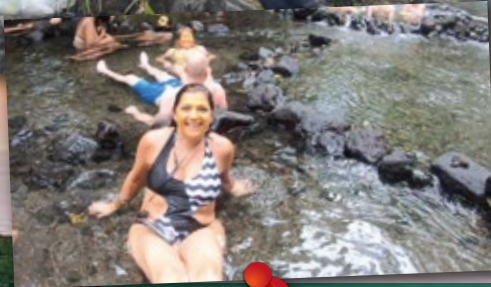
Hiking in the jungle

I am generally an urban chick and hiking in the jungle was in my bucket list because it makes me get out of my comfort zone. Knowing that my surrounding is wild and dangerous is worrying for me, so learning how to feel calm and happy in the forest was a great experience. My tour guide Wilson was so clever and brave. A guy who faced jaguars and snakes all by himself, whose 'office' was the jungle. I found him reassuring. He showed me a super colourful viper which was so well hidden during the hike and despite my snake phobia I managed to look at it without panicking.

My favourite hike was in La Fortuna which offers lots of activities, for the total enjoyment of the family. Around the Arenal Volcano, there are natural attractions, such as waterfalls, hot springs, birdwatching, tropical flowers and wildlife.

During my three hours hike uphill deep in the forest I loved contemplating the majestic Arenal Volcano from everywhere in the trails. The hike through the rainforest took us to a solidified lava flow, product of the last big volcano eruption in 1968.

Bring your sturdy comfy hiking shoes and hiking trousers!



Hot springs

You don't need to spend a huge chunk of money to enjoy the hot springs in Arenal La Fortuna. The free ones were my favourites, naturally warm from volcanic activity. On Google Maps, it is called "Free Natural Hot Springs River". You'll see mostly locals here and it gets super crowded on weekends so make sure to go early so you can grab a spot!



Montezuma and Isla Tortuga

Off the hippy Montezuma beach, Isla Tortuga is one of the best tourist attractions in Costa Rica for its incredible landscapes, perfect sand, crystal clear waters, large palm trees, and wildlife. As the island, you need to go there by an organised boat tour. At weekends it's full of tourists so it's best to avoid that time. This island has a paradise under the sea. It is one of the best places to snorkel where you can see reef sharks, manta rays, turtles, a variety of fish, and coral species. My tour guide William took me to snorkel above a sharks' cave, dived down and took great footage of the sharks while I was swimming above. Scary but amazing how these small sharks seem harmless.



Hanging bridges and ziplining

A great way to explore Costa Rica's many diverse ecosystems is by walking along hanging bridges through the treetop canopy. The amazing view paired with the adventure of crossing a swaying suspension bridge was on my bucket list.

I experienced the Indiana Jones run on hanging bridges at the Mistico Hanging Bridges Park in La Fortuna overlooking Arenal Volcano. The main trail winds through the hillside jungle over six long suspension bridges. Here you can walk through the mossy canopy and experience some fantastic views. Sometimes the fog even covers part of the bridges, giving you the feeling of walking through the clouds.

My friends went on the adrenalin-fuelled Superman ziplining activity in Monteverde, another great destination to experience hanging bridges. In Monteverde, the cool climate and constant wind and mist create a unique cloud forest habitat.



Vibrant colours everywhere

These gorgeous pair of red, luscious lips belong to a plant known as Psychotria elata, a tropical tree found in the rain forest of Costa Rica. I feel so lucky to have seen it!

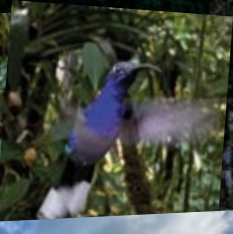
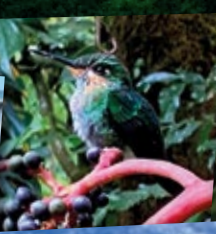
Affectionately, Psychotria elata is called Hooker's Lips or the Hot Lips Plants. The plant has apparently evolved into its current shape to attract pollinators including hummingbirds and butterflies. The bracts are only kissable for a short while, before they spread open to reveal the plant's flowers.

When in Monteverde, after a long hike in the woods I arrived outside the reserve gates to the Café Colibrí. This stop might actually be – with the whale watching experience – the highlight of my holiday. The 'Hummingbird Cafe' is a top-notch spot to refuel with the most delicious cold chocolate while watching the thousands of hummingbirds in the garden that arrive to feed on syrup. Bird watching might become my new hobby even in London.

Experience the Wildlife at Manuel Antonio National Park and Beaches

Manuel Antonio National Park is one of the most beautiful and bio-diverse areas in the world. Although it is the country's smallest national park, the stunning beauty and diversity of wildlife is unequalled. Manuel Antonio contains a charming combination of the rain forest, beaches, and coral reefs. These beaches are the most beautiful in the country, lined with lush forest, and the snorkelling is excellent, too. In the forest I saw sloths, iguanas (also on the beach), the rare and adorable squirrel monkeys, white-faced monkeys, capuchin monkeys, howler monkeys, a type of racoon called coati, spiders that make a golden-web and lots of colourful birds (like the hummingbird). Costa Rica's leafy canopies are always bright with colourful creatures like the toucan!

The park's two most popular beaches, Playa Espadilla Sur and Playa Manuel Antonio are picturesque suitable for long walks on white sand. Standing with your feet dug into the sand and watching the wave crash against the rocks on either side of the lagoon, it is easy to believe that you are a thousand miles from anywhere.



Food and drinks

Costa Rican cocktails are second to none. I had delicious Piña Coladas every day, Mai Thai and Monkey Business (a very sweet and Baileys-based cocktail).

Costa Rican food is tasty but not spicy. The national dish is Gallo Pinto including black beans, rice with onions and cilantro. This meal is traditionally eaten at breakfast, with fried eggs or scrambled eggs, tortillas and sour cream. A Casado is a bowl of rice, red or black beans, and a choice of meat, chicken or fish and vegetables or salad.

With such a dizzying array of experiences and close encounters with wildlife, waves, ziplines, volcanos, the biggest challenge in Costa Rica is choosing where to go first.

I already want to go back to explore the Caribbean side and experience the famous beach parties. Hasta la vista! Pura Vida!



Essential Costa Rica Travelling Tips

Flight

My British Airways flight booked a month before departing cost £600. The ticket is flexible but if booked earlier can be as low as £400.

Travel as light as possible

Backpacks are the ideal luggage to travel around Costa Rica. Try to pack only what is indispensable and clothes that are easy to wash and dry. Pack your regular medication, paracetamol plus diarrheic remedies and probiotics.

Money

Try to use the local currency, the Colón, as much as possible to avoid being ripped off with varying exchange rates. The Costa Rican money is so colourful including animal illustrations. US dollars and major credit cards are widely accepted, though.

Transport

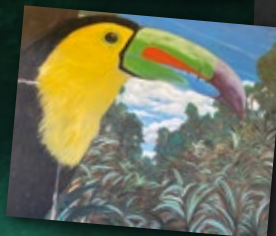
Driving a car in Costa Rica gives you the freedom to navigate the beautiful landscape at your leisure. But it is very expensive and the roads are not safe. Public transport is not too reliable but if you are patient, you'll get everywhere at a fraction of the price.

Accommodation

I used Booking.com and Airbnb to book hotels or rooms as I went along. This gave me the flexibility to prolong my stay if I particularly enjoyed a location.

Language

Many Costa Ricans speak English quite well, but remember the native tongue is Spanish. I suggest brushing up on your Español before departure or you may miss out on local connections.



Tourist office www.visitcostarica.com

Has lots of useful information about destinations and local events.



TOP TIPS FOR TRAVELLING WITH A TODDLER THIS SUMMER

By Julia Minchin

So, you have a toddler and you're thinking of going on a holiday. There are plenty who'll tell you not to bother: wait until they're a bit older and easier to reason with; a holiday with a toddler isn't really a holiday at all.

But travelling with your toddler can be a pleasure. While you may not get to spend hours dozing by the pool with the latest holiday bonkbuster, you can still enjoy a break from the daily grind and spend quality time with your family.

As with many things in life, the key to successful travelling with toddlers is to be prepared. Here are a few things you need to know: -

KEEP IT SHORT!

Unless you've managed to raise the world's only toddler who enjoys sitting still and being quiet for several hours at a time, you'll probably want to keep the journey time as short as possible.

Travel or motion sickness is very common in young children.

Place your child's car seat in the middle of the backseat so they have a clear view of the front window.

Avoid books and screens. Audio books, music, and traditional games such as I Spy are your friends.

Travel at night: this makes everyone's life easier, (apart from yours - sorry!)

BABY CARRYING

Depending on the age of your toddler, be sure to invest in a baby carrier such as a Hippyckick Hipseat. All children will want to be picked up and often in the most inopportune places. A baby carrier will enable you to free up your hands and will also allow adventures anywhere, even places the most robust off-road pram cannot navigate.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Toddlers aren't known for their adventurous eating habits and being in a new place, can often make things worse. If you're self-catering, pack some familiar favourites. Knowing you have the back-up of a faithful Marmite sandwich is very re-assuring.

Have a reward chart or similar for trying new foods on holiday.

Leave your parental guilt at home when you're on holiday and don't stress too much.. It's only a few days in the grand scheme of things, and having a relaxing time is more important than battling over broccoli.

SLEEP

There are no easy answers when it comes to your toddler's sleep on holiday but here are some tips that might just help:

- Try to coincide nap times with car journeys so they're not having too much daytime rest.
- Invest in travel blackout curtains.
- If you're taking a travel cot, let them sleep in it for a few nights before you go away.
- Plenty of exercise and fresh air will always help.

And finally, in a post Covid era, a travel potty so you can avoid public loos is a must. Tron, a disposable eco potty that is sturdy enough to support children weighing up to 30kg will be your saviour. Hippyckick Tron Travel Eco-Potty | Toilet Training On The Go.

BON VOYAGE

www.hippyckick.com



TRAVEL RIGHT

Whether you're backpacking across Costa Rica or taking a short-haul city break, **London Mums have got it covered**



Vionic REMI CASUAL TRAINER

Vionic trainers served me well while hiking uphill on the Arenal Volcano but they were also uber stylish in their leopard print design. As I could not bring too many shoes, Vionic combined the comfort, sturdiness and style in one. A zipper on the side and a durable rubber sole created constant comfort and custom fit. They have become wet near waterfalls and dried quickly. I bet they'll last forever.

RRP £100
Available from
www.vionicshoes.co.uk



Vionic ELLA BACKSTRAP SANDAL

A low-slung, unlined sleek silhouette meets soft, embossed lizard and tumbled leather in this simply chic backstrap slide with buckle closure. The leopard print matched all my holiday outfits and Costa Rica's wild landscapes.

RRP £95 Available from www.vionicshoes.co.uk

Lonely Planet Costa Rica (Travel Guide) Paperback (2021 edition)

Lonely Planet's Costa Rica was my indispensable guide to plan my holidays and trusted travel companion throughout. I have always used Lonely Planet guides for my travels because they suit the type of holidays I like including lots of off-the-beaten track itineraries and tools for family travellers – where to go, how to save money, plus fun stuff just for kids, insider tips to get around like a local, avoiding crowds and trouble spots.

RRP £13.48



OCLEAN Flow electric toothbrush

Even on holiday I want to clean my teeth properly. The Oclean new toothbrush has a light and sleek design as well as effective features such as brush speed, and 5 brushing modes (Morning, Night, Standard Cleaning, Whitening and Gentle). More importantly it has a battery that can last on standby for up to 180 days.

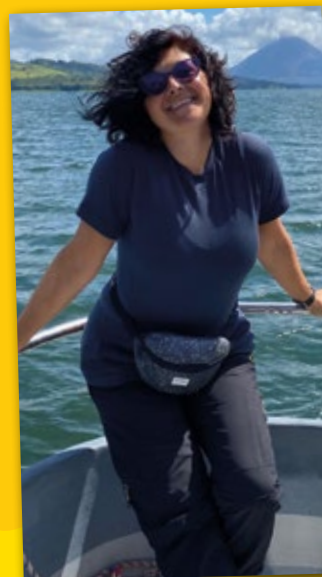
RRP £47 Available from www.oclean.com



UP Fitbelt

Great hidden belt for housing small essentials particularly money and passports while travelling.

RRP £17.99 Available from www.1000mile.co.uk



Artilect Shirt

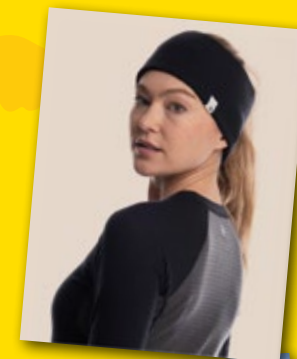
I have chosen Artilect for my hiking base-layers as they utilise NUYARN technology which dries 5 x faster, is 50% more durable and 53% more breathable than traditional merino fabrics. It served me well during the boat trip on the Arenal volcano lake.

RRP £65 Available from www.artilect.studio

Terrace Headband Dusk Blue

If it were the 80's, the Terrace Headband would be the first choice of everyone from Harkin Banks to Monique Junet, and the entire cast of a Greg Stump movie. Since it's not, you get the added benefit of Nuyarn merino Technology, with advance top-of-head venting performance. Welcome to the future!

RRP £25 Available from www.artilect.studio



tentree Festival Hat

This Indiana Jones style hat kept the sun off my head in Costa Rica and served the purpose of looking cool too. The brand is called tentree because it plants ten trees at reforestation projects around the world with every one bought. I'll tip my hat to that!

RRP £40 Available from tentree.co.uk



1000 Mile Approach Socks

During my hikes in the Cost Rican jungle I used double-layered socks to avoid irksome blisters on the move. My feet have never felt so good after hours of uphill walks.

Available from www.1000mile.co.uk



STM Myth Backpack (28L)

During hiking, boat and beach adventures I couldn't have survived without my sturdy STM Myth Backpack not just to keep my essentials safe but also to protect valuable cameras. SlingTech Protection suspends technology away from the floor and sides of the bag at all times. The durable and water-repellent coating was crucial for my Costa Rica adventures as I was often in proximity of water.

RRP £119.95 Available from Amazon.co.uk





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