

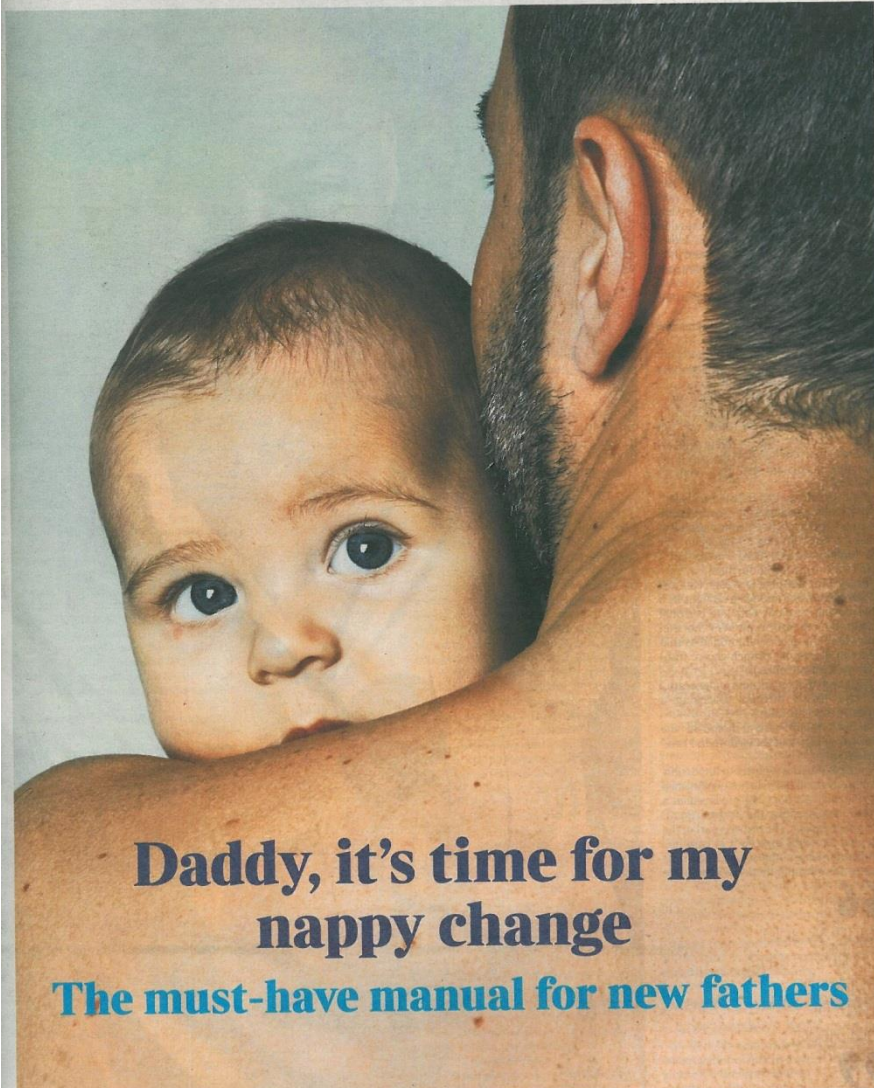


How to make your own sushi

The new way to show off in the kitchen

Weekend

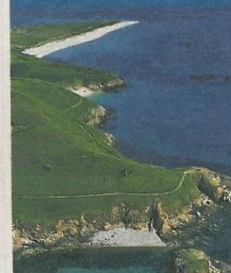
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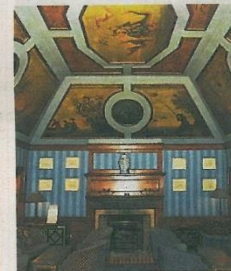
**Daddy, it's time for my
nappy change**

The must-have manual for new fathers

Travel: Britain's small islands



Herm: gem of the
Channel Islands

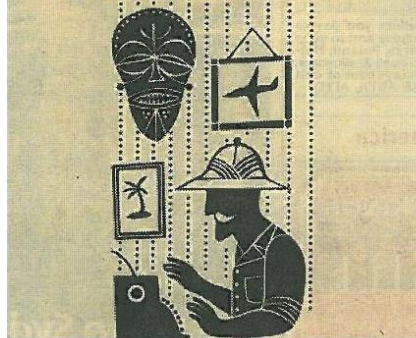


The island hotel
on the Thames



Wildlife spotting
in the Hebrides

Travel doctor



Q My husband and I, and our two adult daughters, would like to go to the Sonepur Cattle Fair in November. This would be our first visit to India so we would like to include other experiences but we are not interested in temples or tourist sights, more in how ordinary people live. We are not seasoned travellers so we would like something organised for us. For health reasons, the trip would need to be quite short, a maximum of 10 or 11 days. Pam Ellis, via e-mail

A Sonepur Cattle Fair is in a remote part of the country and it's an ambitious choice for first-timers to India. Wexas Travel (020-7838 5892, wexas.com) told me there's a lack of comfortable accommodation, it's not as well organised as other festivals and the size of the crowds could be intimidating. Instead, based on the time you have available, it recommends visiting the Pushkar Fair in Rajasthan, a five-day cattle and camel festival that also takes place in November and is better organised. It could arrange a ten-night trip from £1,725pp, including flights, with three days exploring the festival and also time spent visiting locals such as the eco-friendly Bishnois, Brahmin farmers and raikas (shepherds). If you're determined to go to Sonepur, however, Transindus (020-8566 3739, transindus.com) suggests three nights in Delhi, three nights at the Chambal Safari Lodge and three nights in Patna, which is about 15 miles away from the cattle fair. The Chambal Safari Lodge is on a farm so you could learn about farming methods, explore the village, visit the local market and the school, and take a lesson in making curry. A nine-night private tour starts at £2,149pp B&B including all flights.

Q Can you help my family find a summer holiday destination? The children (11 and 13) want a beach with a warm ocean, and a pool. My husband and I will go mad after a week of that so we'd like to spend the second week doing cultural activities. We haven't been away for two years so I am happy to pay for a bit of luxury. I was thinking Mexico, but have heard that Cancun is very tacky now. Samira Millar, via e-mail

A Mexico is a great year-round option for a combination of beach and culture — just don't factor in Cancun, and head 40 miles south to Maroma Beach instead. The Maroma Resort and Spa is owned by the Orient-Express group and has a seafront location, three swimming pools, a games centre and beach activities for children. For a large dollop of culture, spend a few days in Mexico City, visiting the Anthropology Museum, the Frida Kahlo Museum, the Teotihuacán pyramids and Guadalupe shrine. For arts, crafts and culinary delights, go to Oaxaca, where grasshoppers fried in chilli have to be worth a try. A two-week itinerary starts at £3,699pp (four sharing two rooms), including flights to Mexico City and

returning from Cancun, 13 nights' B&B and excursions with Sunvil Traveller (020-8758 4774, sunvil.co.uk/traveller). Tulum, about 90 minutes south of Cancun and home to well-preserved Mayan ruins, would be another great base for your beach week. Audley (01993-838 670, audleytravel.com) could combine a stay here with Mexico City and the colonial city of Merida.

Q We will be on a Thomson cruise in September and the ship is stopping at Palamós in Spain. We would like to visit Girona but Thomson doesn't do an excursion there. What is the most cost-effective and easy way to do this? Peter Cameron, via e-mail

A The cheapest way to get there is by bus. The journey takes about 90 minutes from Palamós to Girona station, from where it's a short stroll to the old town. Tickets are £5.50 one way from Sarfa (www.sarfa.es). If you'd like an organised walking tour, try Girona Tours (gironatours.com). Three hours with a guide costs £34pp and the itinerary includes the cathedral, the Arab baths and the medieval Jewish quarter. Julia Brookes is the Travel Doctor

Don't put up with this Long delay over refund

We made a hotel booking for August 4 last year through Hotels.com. In June our plans changed and I cancelled the reservation and received confirmation of this. However, I then noticed that my credit card had been charged for the booking. I contacted Hotels.com and was asked to send proof of the charge so it could take this up with the hotel concerned. I have made a number of attempts to resolve this and have received no further response to my enquiries. Can you help? It can't be right that it ignores these queries and thinks it can get away with keeping people's money.
Ffion Griffiths, via e-mail

It's the work of a moment to pay for a hotel reservation online but invariably far

more difficult to get a speedy refund. It should not, however, have taken nine months for you to get your money back and there's no excuse for Hotels.com repeatedly ignoring your e-mails. After my intervention, the company has finally apologised for the delay in processing your refund, blaming "customer service agent error" and you now have your £194 back. You were also offered a gesture of goodwill in the form of £50 credit on your hotels.com account but you have turned this down — I'm not surprised.

Contact us...

If you have a gripe, suggestion or question about holiday travel, write to Travel Doctor, The Times Travel Desk, 3 Thomas More Square, London E9 81TT, or e-mail traveldoctor@thetimes.co.uk. Please include contact details. If you have a dispute with a travel company, try to resolve it before contacting us. Do not send us original documents. Unfortunately we cannot reply to every inquiry.