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## The kids are all right

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“THERE are two classes of travel: first class and with children.” When author and wit Robert Benchley spat out these words he was referring to travel in America, but he could as easily have been talking about any part of the world.

No matter the range of your holiday aspirations, from a weekend break in the Highlands to a grand tour of the Far East, there is no doubt that having a sprog in tow slows you down. Worse, it makes it especially difficult to gain access to the more luxurious end of the market, which tends to be geared to a time at least 40 weeks before children first enter your life.

It's not that the best hotels are so blatant as to put 'No children' signs on their doors, or that child-catchers are stationed outside the first-class compartments of aeroplanes or cruise liners; it's not even the laughable 'concession' rates offered by some places so that a rickety camp bed can be stationed at the foot of your four-poster. No, the biggest put-offs for parents are the disapproving frowns of the stewardess or maitre d'hotel, and the knowledge that, rather than unwinding, they'll spend most of the time telling little Max or Mary to stop squealing in case it disturbs the other, child-free, guests.

Some parents, I am told, get so desperate for a suitable break that they even resort to camping. I have yet to sink so low, but the alternative options are becoming scarce: we've already been to Oasis, hit beaches across the globe and, most ambitiously, recently did the Disney thing.

While Child Number One begged to holiday with Mickey and friends again this year (and the year after that, and the year after that...), we were hankering for a bit of adult pampering. We knew we would have to find somewhere that offered something for wee ones too, but we didn't want to settle for a typical self-catering apartment or villa near a beach, no matter how golden.

We stumbled across a new range of breaks from the Mediterranean Experience, which specialises in luxury hotels in that sun-kissed part of the world. The firm's Kids in the Med collection does exactly what it says on the tin, except that the holidays it offers are in five-star hotels and resorts for families who don't want to compromise on luxury just because they might need a high chair at dinner time.

All the hotels in the brochure offer children's clubs, babysitting services, special menus, entertainment and safe swimming pools. Despite the attractions of locations in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Tunisia, we opted for Tenerife, because it guarantees sun pretty much all year. This was a bit of a gamble, though, because we had been to the volcanic isle once in the past and vowed never to return - after being dumped in a hotel infested, in roughly equal numbers, by cockroaches and neds. But we were assured that the resort in question, Costa del Duque, is figuratively, if not literally, 1,000 miles from the holiday hellhole of Playa de las Americas.

On arrival, we had to admit that the hotel was stunning. The Gran Hotel Bahia del Duque is a pink-and-cream palace perched on a hillside overlooking one of the best beaches on the island. Although it has almost 500 rooms, you would never know it is so big, since it comprises a collection of buildings of varying sizes and styles spread over a huge estate.

The one slightly disappointing aspect was our room, which was very comfortable and well-appointed, but on the small side for three sharing - even if one is only five years old (and, as all parents know, the space required for a person actually decreases with age, from the cavern required for a baby's bottles, prams, changing mats and other paraphernalia, through to the six-foot box we need at the opposite end of the mortal coil).

That said, we spent little time in the room and as much as possible out exploring the beach, the seven swimming pools and 11 restaurants. The beach was particularly beautiful and clean, with special access for guests through a guarded entrance from the hotel. The closeness to the hotel ensured that there was no need to pack up a bag in the morning with toys, sunblock, drinks, books, swimming goggles etc and carry it on sunburnt shoulders throughout the rest of the day.

Our visit to the Kids Club showed it to be less an activity centre and more a crèche, where younger children were dropped off to be entertained while Mum and Dad went off to enjoy themselves. There was no prospect of our 'big' five-year-old deigning to enter, but it looked as though, during busier times, there would be more activities for older children.

One of the highlights of the stay, and something that really showed the difference between a quality family hotel and those at the lower end of the market, was the entertainment. I used to dread the 'nights of fun' choreographed by hotel staff when I went on package holidays as a child; it mostly seemed to be designed to get drunk dads to dress up as women and persuade the mums to pass fruit to one another in mildly obscene ways.

But the Bahia's entertainment was a revelation. Each night there was at least one show, from good singers belting out Motown numbers to some gasp-inspiring Chinese acrobats, all introduced by a multi-lingual Belgian who himself seemed destined for the stage.

The contrast with lower-market hotels was also notable when dining. The best meal of the day was, without doubt, breakfast, which is served as a buffet, but is essentially a feast of 20 or so heaving tables offering more dishes than anyone could sample in a week. Overall, the restaurants are fairly formal, with excellent service, a wide range of quality dishes... and a hefty bill. Those used to dining out in the Canaries and still having change from 10 Euros can think again; a meal for three with a couple of glasses of wine comes in at close to 100 Euros.

But if that sounds exorbitant, a short walk of just a mile or so down the coast reminded us just what we were paying for. A saunter into Playa de las Americas took us straight back to our nightmare first stay in Tenerife. There were a few decent-looking eateries on the waterside, but most still specialise in grease-laden dishes of dubiously English origin; the leather goods and other tourist items on sale in the shops were not particularly cheap, considering the quality on offer; and too many of our fellow Britons still think dressing up for dinner means easing their favourite football top over a sunburnt back.

Despite all this, we warmed to Tenerife, deciding that it is, after all, a great place to visit, especially since it offers sun at the end of just a four-hour flight. There are many places to go beyond the beach, most obviously the lunar landscape of the dormant volcano Teide, but also the mysterious Pyramids of Guimar. There are lots of fun places to take the youngsters too, including zoos and water parks. Our own favourite was Castillo San Miguel, which hosts medieval jousting and banquets - what could be more fun than tearing apart a chicken with your bare hands as you cheer on your favoured knight, especially when limitless supplies of wine help give the event the atmosphere of a football match?

We may even go back to Tenerife one day, but only if we can stay in a top-class hotel, whatever the cost. Only that way are you guaranteed a bit of luxury for both you and your children. And, because of the cost, you can be sure there won't be too many other little anklebiters around. After all, as Jean-Paul Sartre almost said, "Hell is other people's children".

## Higher English – Close Reading Practice

### 1. Generic Newspaper Questions

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What is the tone of the article? Does this change at all?
- c) What was the writer's purpose in writing the article?
- d) Does the writer achieve their purpose?

### 2. Linking Questions (underlined in text)

Look at the three underlined sentences in the text (paragraphs 11, 16 and 17).  
Explain how each example acts as a linking sentence.

### 3. The Context Question

Explain how the context helped you understand the meaning of the word  
“exorbitant” (paragraph 16).

### 4. Sentence Structure and Sentence Patterns

- a) Look at the first sentence of paragraph 4. (“Some parents...camping”)  
How effective do you find this line in emphasizing the tone of the article?
- b) Look at line 18.  
Explain how the author uses various techniques to make this an effective addition to his argument.
- c) Look at paragraph 12.  
How does the author's use of inverted commas affect the meaning of ‘nights of fun’?
- d) Show how the writer then clarifies his argument in the next line by using a semi-colon.
- e) Look at paragraph 16.  
What technique does the writer use to involve the reader in the article?

### 5. Language and Tone

- a) Describe the tone of the article.
- b) Explain how the writer's use of word choice contributes to this tone.
- c) Find two examples of colloquial language used in the article.
- d) Explain how effective you find this use of language in the course of the article.

### 6. Evaluation

To what extent would you agree that the final paragraph is an effective conclusion to the article?

Justify your answer by referring to features such as: structure, tone, word choice, ideas and point of view.