



PARIS AND LONDON WITH SMALL CHILDREN

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Paris and London have a reputation of being cities exclusive to lovers, fashionistas and artsy types – playgrounds for adults with style and taste. Experience from a recent trip however, convinces me that London and Paris are cities perfect for children.

In early July I travelled to London and Paris with my husband and two children, aged 4 and 6. It was not the type a trip that most lawyers might take to these centers. In fact, many of my colleagues were aghast that I would put my kids through a transatlantic flight, foreign apartments and public transit. By adjusting our expectations as to what we could accomplish each day, the kids had a wonderful time and the only melt-downs were experienced by me when I failed to properly navigate google map directions.

We spent nine days in London and made an Airbnb in South Kensington our home base. There were no signs of a struggling British economy in our tawny neighbourhood surrounded by lovely homes, bustling restaurants and pretty shops.

Travelling with two small children meant we experienced the best of London's parks and museums. Special attention is made in many locations to ensure that children are engaged. The Science Museum, Museum of Natural History, Transportation Museum and Maritime Museum each had bespoke exhibitions devoted to ensuring kids could have hands on experiences. You might not think a Transportation Museum sounds engaging but our toddlers spent three hours completing its scavenger hunt and playing dress up in its mock bus-station.

Playgrounds were equally exciting with an emphasis on "parent free" adventure areas where children are

signed in and encouraged to explore without parental interference.

We also toured the British Museum, National Gallery and the Tate Modern. Our trick in engaging the kids at each involved absurd counting games such as picking out the number of dogs in a particular gallery or (more popular) counting bare bums in the paintings.

Day trips were taken to Greenwich, Hampton Court (home of Henry VIII's castle) and Windsor (we skipped the location of the recent Royal Wedding and opted for



Legoland instead). Admittedly my kids were nonplussed by seeing the prime meridian but were in awe of the sea of humanity at the Canary Wharf tube station at rush hour. They loved the subway, double decker buses and trains as much as they enjoyed finally seeing Tower Bridge and exploring the Bloody Tower (at the Tower of London).

We travelled by Eurostar to Paris and stayed in an Airbnb in the Marais neighbourhood. Surrounded by trendy cafes and shops my heart sank when we arrived at our apartment. Nothing looked green or inviting for children and I suddenly worried that Paris would be a mistake. Luckily, I quickly realized that the City of Light is filled with lots to keep young children occupied. One of the best kept secrets of Paris is the seemingly random little playgrounds scattered throughout different neighbourhoods and along the Seine. It's hard not to notice the city's genuine dedication to carousels strategically placed close to various landmarks and tourist attractions. Paris is literally designed to keep kids busy while travelling throughout.

Although we climbed the Eiffel tower, we spent more time enjoying the green space in the adjacent Champs De Mars. Likewise, while we made an obligatory trek to the Louvre, we spent much more time in the nearby Jardin des Tuileries full of beautiful flowers, landscaping and sculptures. The mini-carnival rides and playground were also a treat. It was hard to believe my iPad loving children spent an entire afternoon in the beautiful Jardin du Luxembourg pushing wooden sail boats and playing on a playground ripe with Parisian nostalgia – but the city is so beautiful that somehow my children couldn't resist. In a more modern twist, the Jardin de Nelson Mandela near Les Halles offered our kids splash pads in the shadow of an ancient Cathedral and former opera hall.

The highlight of the entire vacation was a day-trip to nearby Versailles. We started by buying groceries for a picnic at an outdoor market and spent the balance of the day on bicycle exploring the grounds of the expansive



palaces. Picnicking at the end of the grand canal with the Palace of Versailles framing our view made it very difficult to want to come home.

We arrived in Europe with no expectations of what to do and simply did what the locals did. We embraced being observers and enjoyed both cities at a slow and relaxed pace. Although my husband and I have both visited London and Paris before we learned there was no better way to experience both cities than with our children who are curious and full of wonder. 🍷