

# Caribbean with kids

It's worth taking on a long-haul flight, even with young children, for a taste of tropical sun and family fun, writes **Deborah Cicurel**

Say the word 'flight' to a parent of young children and you'll see a shudder. Now try 'long-haul flight'. "Never!" they'll inevitably laugh, envisaging eight hours of tantrums and glares from other passengers. I can still feel the scowls from fellow flyers burned into my retinas from a memorably awful flight to France with two children under two.

Yet a long-haul flight is exactly what I'm determined to do with my youngsters. Desperate for some winter sun in the shoulder season, I decide that entertaining two rowdy kids aged three and five mid-air will be worth it in exchange for glorious weather, Caribbean beaches and an abundance of activities in a stunning tropical setting.

#### WARM WELCOME

By the time we land at Punta Cana airport and take the 10-minute drive to Club Med Punta Cana, on the eastern shore of the Dominican Republic, I know we've made the right decision. As we sit in the open-air reception, sipping fresh fruit juices and shedding our

wintery layers to feel the heat on our skin, the tantrums from the plane seem like a distant memory.

This sunny outpost, fringed by tropical palm trees and overlooking the Caribbean Sea, is the latest of Club Med's resorts to enjoy a comprehensive refurb. The renovation includes a gorgeous alfresco reception, an upgrade of 144 of the resort's 566 rooms, and a new restaurant, shop, bar and cafe.

The upgrades bring a fresh feel to the much-loved family resort, which first opened in 1978. Every new space is vast, light-filled and characterfully designed with fun but classy furnishings and design details: think hanging rattan lamps, scalloped parasols and geometric tiles. But of course, the raft of activities for which the all-inclusive specialist is best known hasn't changed.

#### SIMBA OR SPIDER-MAN?

The kids soon forget about any semblance of jet lag, running excitedly from one pursuit to the next: hurtling down waterslides while DJs dressed as Spider-Man spin the decks, watching performances of *The Lion* ➤

Teens playing basketball at Club Med Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

# DESTINATIONS

## FAMILY HOLIDAYS | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Breakfast with a view; writer Deborah with her family; buffet restaurant Chula; the resort is set on a white-coral sand beach



### LONG-HAUL FAMILY TRIPS

- Look at the full range of family accommodation. Those with younger kids may prefer a suite rather than interconnecting rooms, while a separate living area means parents can stay up past their children's bedtime.
- Ask about extras such as baby baths or bottle warmers.
- Check if clients will want to send their children to clubs for kids or teens, and make sure the correct ages are catered for, as many hotels have age restrictions, especially for young babies.
- Look for family-focused deals: many hotels will offer free child places or include meals for kids under a certain age.
- Prioritise direct flights and look for hotels a short transfer from the airport, to keep the journey as simple as possible.
- Check if car seats can be included in transfers, so clients can take less luggage.

King with impressive choreography and dialogue in three languages, and attending parties complete with blasting music, huge bouncy castles and all the snacks they could possibly crave.

Another major perk of the renovation is Club Med's largest-ever water park, where we spend many hours whizzing down the dizzying slides.

The kids' club staff – or in Club Med lingo, 'gentle organisers' or GOs – are indefatigable bundles of energy whom my children immediately adore (and still speak about at home, months later). There's one activity after another in an endless stream of excitement: golf, trampolining, acrobatics, tennis and dance.

Come evening, the GOs take to the stage to perform nightly shows for the captivated kids in their charge, from impressive acrobatic displays to toe-tapping musical performances. Unexpectedly, the jet lag works in our favour: my kids, normally opposed to bedtime, fall asleep quickly every night, exhausted from the non-stop activity.

While this is a kids' paradise, there is also plenty to keep the grown-ups happy. There's an entire adult-only area of the resort, the Zen Oasis, which is perfect for lazing around with a book. As well as dedicated suites, there's an enormous lagoon pool and a bar serving drinks and snacks.

For those with a sportier disposition, there's a jam-packed schedule. In one day, guests can cram in tennis, golf, beach volleyball, Pilates and kayaking, as well as learning circus tricks on the

trapeze, strutting their stuff during a dance class, taking aim in an archery tournament and stretching their muscles during aqua yoga.

### DANCE PARTY

The energy of the cheerful GOs is so infectious, it will convince even the most buttoned-up introvert to break into a communal dance by the end of their stay (take it from a self-confessed awkward Brit who suddenly finds herself taking part in group dances and raucously singing along to the cheesiest of holiday anthems).

After a few days, my daughter asks: "Can we move here, mum? It's so beautiful!" Surrounded by lush vegetation, swaying palm trees and a life-affirming azure sky, I find myself thinking of our usual grey city existence and wanting to say "yes".

On the drive back to the airport at the end of our stay, my children are in tears asking when we'll be back again. I can't give them a precise answer, but the long-haul gamble has more than paid off, leaving me with hope that we'll soon be back for more wholesome family fun, hair-raising waterslide adventures and perhaps even an encore of our entertaining group dance. **TW**

### BOOK IT

Club Med offers seven nights' all-inclusive at Club Med Punta Cana from £2,137 per person, based on four sharing a Family Superior Room, including transfers and flights from Gatwick departing May 23. [clubmed.co.uk](http://clubmed.co.uk)