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# Phuket with two in tow

Travelling with babies and toddlers presents its own set of unique challenges. Heidi Linehan takes her eight-month-old and toddler to Phuket and shares with us her – perhaps surprisingly – enjoyable experience.

**T**ravelling with a baby and toddler anywhere is far from the relaxing holiday I'd enjoyed BK (before kids), but would I do it again? Absolutely I would - plane rides, transits, time differences, tantrums, teething, tsunami evacuations, heat and health precautions all included.

We always knew we would have a challenge with trying to keep our teething eight-month-old, Ashton, happy and entertained for two weeks with just a small bag of toys, and we were also very conscious of keeping him healthy by being careful with what to feed him and watching what he put in his mouth. Lots of antibacterial gel and nappy wipes were taken with us everywhere. Belle, our two-year-old, was entertained with constant swimming, tuk tuk rides and a heap of attention given to her by the friendly Thai people. It took just over a week for her to get used to them, turning a snarly 'don't touch me, I don't like it' to a shy smirk, then a playful smile. By the end of our trip she was even partaking in conversations!

We decided to stay in Karon as it is very central, and our hotel, the Movenpick, comes highly recommended for families. Karon has some market shopping but it is quieter than Patong and is obviously popular with families as we saw lots of strollers being pushed up and down the curbsides and along the road. Kata, a two-minute tuk tuk ride from our hotel, seems to have a bit more action happening; there are more shops, a safer bay beach and variety of restaurants.

## Lazy days

Most days are spent between the kids' pool, having naps and watching DVDs in our room while Ashton sleeps; and not much else. The laidback lifestyle combined with not having to worry about any cooking or cleaning makes it the perfect holiday. Bringing a laptop loaded with Peppa Pig and other shows is one of the best decisions I made as Belle is happy with that while Ashton sleeps, and we are able to read or have a little nanna nap ourselves. Since most things open at 11am, and we have our little 'human' alarm clocks waking us at 6am, there are quite a few hours of meandering, lazing and swimming to do before we can get out and about. With lots of shops and a spa at our hotel, some days we treat ourselves to a massage while the kids sleep - just like the holidays I remember before kids! If I can slip out undetected, some days I go for a shop at the market while they are asleep too. A better idea though is to go shopping at night, when the heat of the sun has disappeared and a breeze sweeps across the waterfront.

One evening we go up to the temple markets, which we are told are quite good. Being Easter however, I think only a few stallholders have set up. There is a range of goods from fried bugs and fruit smoothies to rip-off name brand sunglasses. Most other evenings are spent having a quick dinner at a restaurant, maybe a little browse in the shops, then back to the room early for Ashton to sleep. The nights when Ashton falls asleep early, we get pizza and burgers from Sand Bar at the resort and eat on our bed - a treat we don't enjoy at home. Yummy! →



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### Exploring

Before leaving I had researched drivers that catered for families with little ones by having baby seats. I found a guy called Sam who agreed to take us out for a day tour. The car seats were not exactly fitted to our standard, but definitely better than not using one at all. We set out on a damp morning to see southern Phuket. First, we headed to the Kata lookout, which offers amazing views, even in the rain, before continuing on to Laem Promthep, which is a very popular spot to view the sunset. Arriving just after 10am, we had the place to ourselves. We bought some seafood; prawns and a whole fish, from the sea gypsies at Rawai and took it across the road to a restaurant to get it cooked. There are a line of sea gypsy stalls down one side of the dirt waterfront road selling all sorts of seafood, and rickety restaurants on the other. It was so unassuming, yet it was the best seafood I ate in Phuket. After lunch we arrived in Phuket Town, where we cruised the streets looking at all the Cino Portuguese architecture while snacking on local biscuits and sweets. We found the weekend market's location and it was huge. It would be worth a trip back, but unfortunately we don't have the time.

Staying in Karon, we were within 10 minutes' drive of Patong, and a few minutes' drive to Kata. Tuk tuks are a fun way of getting around, but still cost the same as a taxi. Belle liked to choose which colour she wanted to ride in each time and her face lit up one day when we came across a

pink one, her favourite colour. Needless to say, we beeped about in that pink tuk tuk nearly all that day. Belle's face, the first time we got in one, was like a little girl seeing Father Christmas for the first time. It's a ride of excitement, waving, and comments about how naughty all the people are for riding bikes without helmets.

Seeing my children's faces light up as they watched the elephants, played on the beach, went riding in tuk tuks and got to meet lots of different people makes all the dramas and hassles of travelling overseas with kids worthwhile. Even being evacuated from the hotel due to a tsunami warning for five hours is something I'd do again. Because of the warning, Belle found a new friend to play with, and opened new opportunities for us to talk to the locals and other Indian tourists. We were even invited inside the locals' homes, and got to experience the true warmth and hospitality of the friendly Thai people.

As for the flights, presents, pipe cleaners and craft ensure Belle is entertained for quite a while. Then out comes the laptop for some cartoons while Ashton is racing around the toilet area chatting to people with 'pipe cleaner' glasses on. Also a night flight coming home means sleeping angels nearly all the way. Wow, how lucky are we. ✨

01 Movenpick Spa 02 Elephant at Kok Chang Safari near Kata 03 Rawai restaurants 04 Movenpick kids' area in the main pool 05 Karon beach 06 Belle wanting to ride in the Movenpick tuk tuk 07 Sandcastles on the beach



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## PHUKET REPORT CARD

### → Getting there

Jetstar, Thai Airways and Virgin Australia offer direct flights from select cities. Other airlines offer regular flights via Bangkok, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur.

### 🏠 Stay

The Swiss Movenpick Resort and Spa Karon Beach is on the beachfront at Karon. A variety of room types, lush gardens, selection of restaurants, four pools and a kids' club are some of the features. [www.movenpick-hotels.com](http://www.movenpick-hotels.com)

### 👍 Thumbs up

It might not be the safest mode of travel, but a tuk tuk ride is a must. The kids will love it. Open sides, blaring music, colourful interior and exterior.

### 🔥 Hot tip

Trust the locals to look after the kids while you are eating, and find restaurants that take them out of your arms. Ratchanee and The Little Mermaid in Karon are good.

### 💰 On the cheap

A little restaurant in Karon's main street, right next to the big glass-fronted mini-mart is recommended as one of the best Thai eateries in Karon. No name, no fuss, just delicious food. Butterflies on the menu cover. \$10 for three meals and drinks.

### 🕒 When to go

The best time to go to Phuket is between December and March, when humidity is down and there is less chance of rain.

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