





# The Summer of Love

The sun is shining, you're on maternity leave and, best of all, you have a beautiful bouncing baby for a travel companion. So don't just sit there, get out and about...

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**R**EMEMBER THOSE HAZY, lazy summer holidays of your childhood. With the promise of endless weeks of idle pursuits with friends stretching out in front of you, it felt like the good days would never end. Then came the serious business of growing up, getting a job, earning a wage, with some highlights thrown in – getting married and having a baby. Now your brand new babe is here, and there's an added bonus: maternity leave. Think of it as a holiday (paid, if you're lucky) from the humdrum routine of your daily working life and a chance to enjoy time with your baby. The best advice: enjoy it while you can.

Sound a little bit unrealistic? Well, as I write, my son Thomas is now nine months old and it's his first day at nursery. So, here I am, on my own, counting down the hours until I can go and collect him.

Our 'summer of love,' with its sauntering walks, park visits, baby groups and baby singing classes, is officially over. I'm back to earning a few pennies, albeit part-time, and Thomas is venturing further afield, meeting new friends without Mummy. While I feel sad that he can't spend every waking hour with me, realistically, today is a good day. Thomas is delighted to be with new friends and I'm spending a few hours doing what I enjoy, but I'll always look

back fondly on our first months together. When you've just had a baby, it can be tempting to stay at home and attempt to assume domestic-goddess status. But the housework can wait: I knew it was time for Thomas and I to get out of the house when I caught myself ironing muslins.

Unless you're fortunate enough to have a personal trainer, chef and fabulous genes, chances are you may not be feeling particularly special about your post-birth figure. Heading out for walks with the pram is a great way to shed a few pounds, even if you begin with a quick stroll around a local park. For the city girls amongst you, super-stylish website Bugaboo has compiled a list of individual maps of cities around the world, with tailor-made daytrip routes taking in the best city landmarks, parks and places to eat.

For mothers and babies who wish to flee the city for the natural delights of the countryside, the Pushchair Walks website offers a great variety of destinations. "Heading off-road is great exercise for you, and a lovely way to introduce your baby to the countryside," says co-founder Rebecca Terry. "Why not go with a few friends, pack a picnic and make a day of it? The key is to get a great three-wheeler with blow-up tyres and fixed wheels, along with some cosy blankets for chillier days." Alternatively, you can try the Taga, an ingenious new stroller/bike concept from the Netherlands that is perfect for leisurely countryside cycle

**“Now's your chance to escape the humdrum routine and enjoy time with your baby”**

rides with your baby enjoying the trip in the comfort of a fitted stroller, while you have the benefit of a calorie-burning workout.

You might also like to consider joining the new breed of mothers who use their babies and pushchairs as part of their exercise regime – after all, a baby plus buggy on a steep incline at a brisk pace will burn quite a few calories.

Exercise classes run by clubs like Buggyfit, FitMama, Power Pramming and Pushy Mothers are also popular. “My Buggyfit sessions were great,” says Ali Cobb, mother of Felix, ten months. “It got me out of the house and running about in the fresh air is a great start to the day.” I’ve also enjoyed many an afternoon with my FitMama friends. I’m sure we look amusing marching around the local village with our buggies but we don’t care. You can guarantee that during our ‘run’, at least one of us will have a minor pelvic floor issue.

But we’re all in the same boat: we’re toning up and enjoying a little camaraderie while our babies get some fresh air and remain bemused at the sight of Mummy doing squats. “Endorphins produced by exercise can give a natural boost and many of my new mothers say how energised they feel after a class,” says Zoë Dodds, founder of FitMama in Oxfordshire. “The social aspect is just as important as the exercise itself. There’s always someone who hasn’t had much sleep the night before and just having people around who understand and encourage makes it a lot easier to cope.”

**O**F COURSE, AS well as toning up the baby belly, getting out and about is all about making new friends. As a new mother, you want to meet other new mothers to share experiences and to encourage and support each other. “A few weeks after the birth I felt quite depressed,” says Lucy Moore, mother of six-month-old Jack. “My baby suffered from colic and I was exhausted. One evening, a few of the girls from my NCT group dragged me out to the pub. It was wonderful to have someone to talk to, and it made me realise I wasn’t the only one having a tough time.”

Joining the NCT is a great way to meet other local mothers. There are over 300 branches dotted around the UK that host baby groups, coffee mornings and social activities. “Having a baby is an exciting and often challenging time,” says antenatal teacher Helen Addison. “Many first-time mothers get very lonely when they stop



## SUMMER LOVING

- ☀️ **Head for the beach** Slap on the suncream and find a shaded spot to unwind with your baby, building sand castles and enjoying the therapeutic sound of the waves lapping against the shore.
- ☀️ **Stick on some tunes** There are many popular summer anthems, but none will enthrall your baby more than a cheerful, even if tuneless, rendition of *The Sun Has Got His Hat On*.
- ☀️ **Adjust to a summer diet** Opt for a cool crunchy salad or a heathy barbecue with friends. And treat yourself to a good old-fashioned 99 for dessert (though, of course, Mr Whippy is off-limits for any pregnant friends).
- ☀️ **Use alternative transport** Take a leisurely punt down the river with your partner doing all the work while you safely cuddle your babe-in-arms.

work, and it helps to talk through how you are feeling.”

But if exercise classes and coffee mornings are not your thing, then swimming, baby massage and singing and signing are all popular options and, as well as being fun, will really help develop the bond between you and your baby. “When you take part in social activities with your baby, you’re broadening her world, and you have something lovely to chat about when you get home,” says Sasha Felix, founder of Sing and Sign, the UK’s biggest baby signing group. “Babies need to experience how others interact to help them develop into sociable beings.”

It’s also the perfect opportunity to meet like-minded parents who enjoy sharing time with their babies. “The best thing about classes is that they add structure to our week,” says Ali. “Felix loves swimming. We’d go

a bit stir crazy if we just stayed at home all the time.”

However, if you’re itching to put your trainers on or dash off to a local swimming lesson, make sure you do a little research first. The NCT will be able to give you details of local classes, and it’s always worth asking other mothers for recommendations of the best clubs in your local area.

Going from spending the day at home to a fun-packed week of activities could be a bit of a shock to the system, so ease yourself in gently. And, see whether you can ‘try before you buy’. Many activities, such as music classes, offer a free trial session so you can test the water before committing yourself to a full term.

If you prefer to keep life a bit less hectic, choose the activities you think you’ll enjoy. If you’re no swimmer but enjoy singing, give the splashing around a miss for a while and focus on the vocal cords instead. Or you may prefer to just stroll in the park, then spread a blanket under a tree and spend an idle hour or two admiring the wonder of your gorgeous new baby. So relax and enjoy these precious moments while they last... ■



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## RESOURCES

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- [www.bugaboodaytrips.com](http://www.bugaboodaytrips.com) Plan inspiring daytrips with your baby by using their customised city map at home and abroad.
- [www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com](http://www.nctpregnancyandbabycare.com) Information and locations of coffee mornings and social activities in your area.
- [www.pushchairwalks.co.uk](http://www.pushchairwalks.co.uk) Over 200 countryside walks.