

» **CAMPING SPECIAL** - BEAT THE BUDGET

**COVER
FEATURE**

TEN YEARS OF CAMPING FOR THE PRICE OF ONE FOREIGN HOLIDAY



£5,000 to stay here or enjoy 10 years of camping?



Sounds impossible? Well **Iain Duff** has worked out how you can provide your family with a decade of camping memories for the cost of a fortnight in a Spanish villa.

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↓ You don't need to be a financial wizard to realise that money is a bit tight at the moment. Belt-tightening and cutting back on spending are the order of the day for pretty much everyone, and George Osborne's latest budget hasn't improved things for most of us.

Unfortunately all this comes at a time when everything seems to be getting more expensive and holidays are no exception. Research carried out by a travel insurance firm recently, put the total average cost of a two-week family holiday abroad at almost £5,000. Yes, you read that correctly. Five. Thousand. Pounds. For a fortnight's holiday.

My first thought was that you could get a good second hand car for that amount of money. My second thought was: "How many camping holidays would that pay for?" Based on a rough back-of-a-beer-mat calculation, I quickly worked out that you could get at least 10 years' worth of brilliant camping trips in the UK for the same amount of money.

Don't believe me? OK, here's an example: at the Gibraltar Farm campsite at Morecambe

Bay in Lancashire you'd pay £12 for a pitch for a family of four in high season. Over 14 nights that works out at £168 – and if you repeat that ten times it comes to £1,680. Add in spending money, travel costs, a couple of family tents and some other gear and you're still under the £5,000 cost of one foreign holiday. Of course, once you've made the initial investment in the camping equipment you can use it as many times as you like. In fact, chances are you've already got almost everything you'd need anyway.

So you're not getting the guaranteed good weather of a trip to the Continent. But equally you don't have to worry about getting to the airport for a 3am departure, hotel transfers, screaming kids on the plane and, worst of all, the endless hours spent in the check-in lounge thanks to delayed flights. And once you've reached your destination you won't have any concerns about mosquitoes, the language barrier, sunburn or trying to avoid pubs selling all-day breakfasts. And with the money you've saved on your main family holiday, you can

always get your fix of foreign travel with a cheap city break later in the year.

Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against Spanish villas. In fact we spent one of our best family holidays in one and if anyone out there has a place in Mallorca they want to lend me for a couple of weeks this summer drop me a line (I'm kidding!). However, at a time when every penny counts, it's becoming difficult to justify the expense of heading off abroad, especially when you can enjoy a holiday at home for a fraction of the cost and have just as good a time.

Family camping on a budget does take a bit of planning though. Start by writing a list of what you'd need for a fortnight under canvas, then check off everything you already have. Once you've done that you can draw up your shopping list and start bargain hunting. All the main retailers have online outlets and with a bit of research you're sure to find some good deals. Online auction sites like eBay are also worth a look, especially if you're willing to go second hand (or 'vintage'

Budget busting Gibraltar Farm Campsite in Lancashire is just £12 a night in mid-summer





as they say nowadays). Cheap and cheerful is always tempting, but remember we're looking long term here. Quality brands tend to outlast their cheaper rivals so it might be worth investing in something a bit more expensive that will do you for 10 years rather than having to fork out every couple of years for a replacement model.

In saying that, our first family tent cost a grand total of £99 from the cash-and-carry outlet Makro. The package also included two chairs, a table, a stove, airbeds, and four sleeping bags. Granted, it wasn't all the highest quality gear, but five years on everything is still in regular use, apart from the sleeping bags. In fact, they were sold on eBay so may well be still in use for all I know.

After buying your tent, your biggest outlay will be on the site fees, so it's important you spend some time and effort picking the right place to stay. It's possible to book a pitch for as little as £5 a night, but remember for a family holiday you'll need decent facilities, like showers, baby changing rooms and play



Messing around in the river costs nothing

areas. Try and weigh up the cost against the amenities. You might have to pay a couple of pounds extra per night for a campsite with a good play park but if your kids use it every day instead of demanding to go somewhere else to pass the time, then you're going to save money in the long run.

Another obvious way to keep costs down is to cook your own food. Campsite shops are convenient but tend to be quite expensive so consider a site within driving distance of a supermarket. It's a bit boring, but planning your meals in advance will also save you money. Draw up a menu and buy as much as you can in advance. Don't forget this is a holiday though. If you can share the cooking duties, all the better, and if your budget allows it, try to treat yourself to a nice meal out once a week. A few pints in the pub is nice but can be expensive. Taking advantage of supermarket special offers on booze and relaxing with a few drinks on site of an evening can be just as enjoyable as visiting the local hostelry – especially if you're camping with friends.

So is it possible? Finding the right site is vital for a start and there's no doubt that a £15 a day budget would be difficult to keep to. But with planning and willpower it is certainly achievable. But don't forget – camping is supposed to be fun, so don't turn the whole thing into a nightmare for the sake of a few pounds, or you might find it difficult to persuade anyone to do it again next year.

SET A BUDGET

How much do you want to spend? Well to ensure you meet our 'cost-of-a-Spanish-villa' budget you'll have to keep spending to the bare minimum. Could you survive on £15 a day? If you do your own cooking and keep extraneous spending to a minimum then it should be possible. The important thing is that you should decide in advance what you're going to spend and stick to it strictly.

LIVE CHEAP

Cook your own meals and take packed lunches on trips. Sainsbury's recently ran a promotion insisting you could feed a family for £50 a week so it is possible to keep costs down to a minimum. The key here is planning and avoiding having to eat out every day. Take advantage of free activities nearby – beaches, museums, castles etc. If you are going to splash out on a theme park visit, try to get hold of 2-for-1 vouchers in advance (see our feature on theme park camping elsewhere in this issue for more money-saving tips). Socialising on site, rather than going to pubs or restaurants, will save a fortune.

Keeping the kids entertained can often be expensive, so don't be afraid to bring a DVD player, electronic games and books for when the weather is bad. The rest of the time they can entertain themselves! ➔



Keep the kids occupied for free and choose a site with good play facilities like these



Walking is a popular free activity at Morecambe Bay. Either that or someone's giving away ice cream on the beach



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BUYING GEAR

If you want to buy everything new then your best option is to go for a package deal from one of the big retailers. These deals change all the time and you need to search around to find the offer that suits you. But there are real bargains to be had. For example, at the time of writing, the online retailer www.outdoorworld.co.uk was offering a family camping package for £439.99. The deal included a Sprayway Hood River six berth tent and matching front extension, carpet, footprint groundsheet and windbreak. Also part of the package was one double and two single airbeds, four sleeping bags, an Outwell electric pump, a Campingaz double burner stove, a kitchen unit and table, a lantern and an electric hook-up. Apart from camping chairs and cooking gear that's pretty much all the basics you'd need and if you look after them well that little lot could last you ten years.

The second option is to go online and trawl the auction website eBay. Again you need to spend a little time and effort searching for the ideal tent and equipment but you could land yourself some great deals this way. A search for new 5-7 berth tents threw up more than 100 options, mostly from well-known names like Gelert, Vango, Coleman and Sunncamp, all for less than £100. Go second-hand and the bargains are even better – with a bit of luck you could pay as little as £20 for a good quality tent. There's tons of new and used gear for sale as well, so you could easily get all the items on your wish list from eBay. Of course there's always a risk when buying second hand online that the "excellent quality" promised in the listing turns out not to be quite so excellent after all. Look closely at the photos

STAY AT...



GIBRALTAR FARM CAMPSITE

Jenny Brown's Point, Silverdale, Lancashire LA5 0UA

☎ 01524 701736

🌐 www.gibraltarfarm.co.uk

💰 **Cost** £12 per night

Sitting right on the edge of Morecambe Bay, this is a great value family campsite with a brand-new shower and toilet block, free hot water and showers, electric hook-ups and a

stall selling home-made ice cream.

You can walk through National Trust woodlands and nature reserves around Morecambe Bay and along local footpaths.

Nearby RSPB Leighton Moss Centre is popular for birdwatching.

Silverdale village centre, which has a railway station, is a ten-minute walk away with pubs serving food and shops, including a late-opening Co-op store. The Lake District and Morecambe are a short drive away

Discover your next dream campsite with **Camping magazine's FREE CAMPSITE FINDER TOOL** - Online at www.campingmagazine.co.uk

and make sure the seller has good feedback before committing to the purchase.

FIND A SITE

The temptation when booking a site is to find somewhere as far away from home as possible. But to save fuel (and money) – why not look for somewhere relatively close-by instead? A 50 mile journey should take most people in Britain to a campsite in an area worth visiting, whether it's on the coast, in the countryside or one of our towns or cities. Timing is also vital – if you're not bound by school holidays you can usually take

advantage of lower rates.

Also consider somewhere close to free activities. If beaches are your thing, pick a site near the coast or if your family are keen hikers then choose somewhere at the bottom of a hill. Museums and castles are often free, so a site close to a town would be ideal if that's something that appeals. A remote campsite can be idyllic, but being near a built-up area is good for keeping costs down in other ways. Petrol costs will soon soar if you have to drive miles to get anywhere and easy access to a supermarket keeps food costs down. ■



Our first family tent cost less than £100 - unfortunately we only had one pair of shoes between us

HOW WE WORKED IT OUT

CAMPING	
Campsite £12 x 14 nights =	£168
Eating/drinking £15 x 14 nights =	£210
Transport/fuel 160 miles =	£35
TOTAL (£413 x 10 years)	£4,130
Family tent package	£440
Replacement 2nd hand tent	£100
Extra gear	£330
TOTAL	£5,000

SPANISH VILLA

Average cost of two week foreign holiday

£5,000



Tweet us your top money saving ideas
#campingbargains