

## Going on a Summer Holiday

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**By: Robin Pascoe**

“What do you mean you don’t know what your Home Leave plans are yet?” one expat said to another recently.

“Don’t you know that flights have to be booked months in advance?” piped up another. “It’s probably too late now. You could be stuck here all summer.”

“We have had our tickets for ages, since January in fact! They were booked the minute we got back from Christmas leave!” said a third.

The expat without a Home Leave itinerary felt left out and ostracized. So he picked up his shovel and bucket and moved to the other side of the sand box, far away from his so-called friends. He needed to be left alone with his thoughts. What could his mommy and daddy be thinking? Why had they left the plans so late? Everyone else in the school yard knew what they would be doing come the summer. Except him! He would definitely have to talk to his mother about this situation. Right after his afternoon nap, he decided, would be a good time.

That same night, after she had read her son a bedtime story and tucked him into his bed, his mother locked his father in his home office and demanded they discuss summer Home Leave plans that absolute minute. She started out by explaining the school yard incident and the emotional trauma incurred upon their five-year old son. “You may be too busy to care, but your son is feeling alienated. Without a Home Leave schedule, he doesn’t fit in with the other kids,” she said.

The father looked at his wife like she had lost her mind. “I thought you were dragging me away from my work for something really important. Not over a summer vacation.”

“You just don’t get it do you,” she said. “Home Leave is the biggest holiday break on the expat calendar. Kids compare plans all the time. One kid is going to Europe, another on an African safari, still another to New Zealand. How do you think our son feels not having any vacation plans?”

The husband looked doubtful. “I find it hard to believe that our son is even capable of looking that far ahead. If you tell him what he’s going to do next week he can barely fathom the concept. Don’t tell me....”

“No, you listen to me! I need to know your holiday schedule and I need to know it now. I have waited long enough for you to tell me when you can get a break so I can plan something. I need information now!”

“And I keep telling you I don’t know and won’t know for weeks. Why don’t you just go on without me?”

“Like last year? And the year before? And the year before that? What fun for me to see all your relatives on my own.”

“You are the one insisting on this.”

The mother could only shake her head in frustration.

Over breakfast the next morning, the mother watched as her son scooped up his favourite cereal. When he put his spoon down, she took his little hand in her own and told him she needed to have a serious talk with him.

“Is this about Home Leave mummy?” asked the little boy.

“Yes it is. I have talked to your father about it.”

“And?”

“He doesn’t know yet when he can get some holiday time. That’s why we haven’t booked anything yet. Can you understand that honey?”

“Well how come the other kids’ daddies know when they can go away?”

“I’m willing to bet they don’t. I think if you asked your friends in the sand box you would discover that nobody’s daddy is even going on Home Leave. Only the mummies are going.”

“But that’s not fair to the daddies!” he said.

This is how it begins, thought the mother. This is how they grow up to become expat husbands.

“Oh don’t worry about daddy,” she said to her son, her smile forced. “He won’t suffer being on his own for a while if we go away and he stays behind.” The mother pushed all thoughts of her husband’s comfort while she is away on the other side of the world out of her mind, and tried to stay focussed.

“I want to stay here with daddy,” said the son suddenly. “You go away by yourself and I’ll stay here and look after daddy.”

“But there won’t be many kids around to play with.”

“I don’t think daddy should be here on his own.” His mother didn’t rush to disagree.

“Well if that’s what you want.....” said his mother.

“Yes it is.”

“Then I can’t wait to tell your father that we have made our Home Leave plans. I know he will be absolutely thrilled.”

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