



Tyke it easy



Small wonders . . .
Elise and Kellie at the Bay of Islands on the Great Ocean Rd; and below, party girls Elise and Bella, both 18 months, relaxing at the Anglesea campsite.

Need a break, but one that's toddler-friendly? Try camping in the great outdoors, writes TRUDY ORAM.

WE were holidaying with two highly spirited, curious and rambunctious toddlers. It was going to be a challenge. Luckily, we mums are planners by nature and everything "seemed" organised. The decision to travel in numbers – two families – had been a good one, especially when you're heading to the great outdoors. But as we battled to control the wild 18-month-olds (who were experiencing new-found freedom after hours in the car on our way to the Great Ocean Rd), while slowly unpacking the mountain of luggage and attempting to build our temporary accommodation, the long day took its toll and reality set in.

We were going to be sleeping in tents . . . on the ground, away from creature comforts, with no barriers or gates to contain the fast little legs of the juniorettes who didn't yet know the meaning of "don't run . . . , come back here . . . , watch the tent rope". Perhaps camping with toddlers wasn't going to be the most relaxing holiday ever.

But a few short hours later all was well. After a long day in the fresh seaside air, running and falling and getting up again, our little girls couldn't help but succumb to sleep –

even if they were somewhat unsettled in the unusual surroundings – after all, the arrival of twinkling stars above was far more interesting than going sleepy time. With babes tucked up in portacots, it was time for wine o'clock and we were on holiday.

I'll admit, when the idea of going camping with toddlers first came up we were a bit dubious – wouldn't an island holiday in a five-star family resort be better? One with kiddie activities and perhaps, babysitting? But holidays are expensive, especially for families, and our budget wasn't going to stretch to the five-star resort.

Our drive/camp holiday was the perfect concession. It's a fun way to explore somewhere like the Great Ocean Rd and, curiously, it is a way of gaining more precious time with your family. Camping means there's no threat of wanting to sleep in that luxury king-size bed or the teen that won't move from in front of the plasma. No, it's up with the birds – in this case, toddlers – out of the tent and you're off and so are they . . .

Our camping spot at Anglesea's Big 4 Holiday Park (1800 651 641), at the eastern end of the Great Ocean Rd,

is as child-friendly as camping spots can be. Our girls spied the playground and sandpit from 50m and, little legs flying, headed there at every oppor-

tunity. Next to the playground is an indoor toddler room filled with toys, ride-ons and gym equipment, and adjacent, there's a games room with TV, arcade games and table tennis for older kids. When they tired of that, there was always the tennis court, the indoor swimming pool to splash in, evening movies and, in peak periods such as school holidays, planned activities to give mum and dad a break.

Of course, our little ones found the laundry and family bathrooms (with a full-size bath for children) far more interesting and happily sat on the steps, while we looked on from the camp kitchen. They found it hilarious, and it was. Powered campsites mean there's still access to iPods, phone chargers and laptops (broadband internet access is available) for technology-deprived teens, or DVD players if you want to keep the Wiggles fans happy.

We could tell other campers with toddlers had done this before; their sites were better set up, some with fold-up high-chairs, children's bicycles and their pre-cooked, seemingly instant meals. We were jealous. Beside our sleeping quarters we'd set up a flyscreen-shade



tent as a makeshift toy room with the basket loads we'd brought with us. Of course, the bubs weren't fussed with it and were more content to see what the neighbours were doing, eat ice out of the Esky or noisily run up the cabin ramp next to our site and play "boo".

This is one of the best things about travelling with toddlers; they're easily pleased and willing to go wherever you take them. Their curiosity knows no bounds and the Great Ocean Rd is fabulous for this, whether it was the sight of the Southern Ocean, 12

Apostles or even farm animals, they'd squeal with excitement. These experiences cost nothing and the memories will last.

With Bells Beach nearby, this was surfing territory, but for young children Anglesea's Toddlers Beach is perfect for fun. Its sheltered cove keeps away big swells and little ones can play safely in the shallows.

And toddlers don't even mind being trawled around the shops. With all the big surfie brands such as Quiksilver, Billabong, Ripcurl and Roxy in

Torquay, it was not somewhere we wanted to miss. Label babies don't miss out either – everything comes in sizes from 0000 upwards. Our girls loved it and hopped up on a podium to pose with a Ripcurl mannequin. It was priceless.

Our toddlers had a ball and loved being outdoors, it helped their confidence, spirit and the healthy dose of exercise was good for us all – especially when they went to bed quickly and wine o'clock started early.

