

the tots times

*Juggling Act -
life as a working mum*

Fertility - how the
statistics stack up

*No More Lunch
Breaks - life as a
stay-at-home-mum*

Raising Boys - do
they need a
different
approach?

Spring Crafts - coffee
filter butterflies and
Easter bunnies

**PLUS... A NEW FAMILY-FRIENDLY CAFE, MICHELIN-STARRED
DINING AND MUCH MORE.**

President's Letter



Dear Members,

Spring is here and with it a brand new edition of The Tots Times. We are so lucky to have Charley and Katy's professional skills put to great use in producing such a wonderful publication for all our members. Thank you ladies!

Our skills and qualifications often get overlooked when we become parents. It can be so all-consuming to have little ones at home that often it is difficult to remember who you are and what skills you possess outside changing nappies and helping with homework. We know that we have a huge array of skills and talents within our

Tots & Co membership, although I'm ashamed to admit that often I have known someone for months or even years before I realise what they did BC (before children).

I always think it's great to hear from working parents about the world's hardest balancing act. In this edition Jenny Dalhuijsen, an Aeronautical Engineer, gives great insight into how she manages to combine her professional life with her home life. We have another great 'Focus On...' article from our resident doctor Dee Davidson about fertility, while former social worker Emma Evans describes how she adjusted to life as a stay at home mother.

So I'm pleased to be able to present this fantastic array of talent and skills, all poured into our spring newsletter just for you. Enjoy!

Celia x

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....PLUS MUCH MORE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: NEW MEMBERS

Sam Crawley

What brings you to Toulouse?

A large aircraft manufacturer, you may have heard of, offered my wife Jacqui a role here. I was commuting to Hamburg at the time, so neither of us were spending a great deal of time in the UK as it was, so it seemed like a good chance for an adventure.



How long have you been here and for how long will you stay?

We've been here 4 and half years now, no immediate plans to return but we are being more proactive in our efforts to return to our spiritual home of Bristol.

Tell us about your family

Jacqui and I were married in 2010 in Bristol, Jacqui's family are in Liverpool, mine near Basingstoke. Emeline was born here in Toulouse in September 2013. On my side of the family she's the first girl in 4 generations and she's the first grandchild for both families and therefore much adored. It seems slightly weird to think we have spent all our time with a child here in France and longer as a married couple living here, than in the UK.

What did you do before fatherhood/ what do you do now?

I was (and am) an engineer; particularly I used to work on Offshore Wind Farm projects but also doing some consultancy work.

These days it's the (no doubt, familiar) mix of cooking, shopping, playing, cleaning, toddler groups, doctors visits.... tantrums, negotiations, comforting, teaching, loving...etc which come with being the full time parent. I'm trying to get some remote consulting work to fit in with the parenting, some weeks it seems more achievable than others.

What do you do in your free time?

I've joined the Toulouse kayak club and go on a Wednesday evening (having negotiated with Jacqui - this is my 'night-off'). They're based in town and have a white water/slalom course; it's a good challenge for my paddling and my French (although both at the same time often ends with me swimming.).

What are your favourite things about France?

Food, wine, cheese, sunshine, water, mountains and more than 1,500 restaurants in the Toulouse metropolitan area: these are a few of my favourite things.

What do you miss about “home” and what noticeable differences do you find between France and your home country?

We miss friends and family, and miss being there for the changes they (and we) go through as life goes on. Oh, and the National Trust and their coastal path, I so take access to the coast for granted thanks to them, to not find it a global, common right always comes as a shock.



Bumps to Babies

Bumps to Babies (Tots & Co's pregnancy and new mums' support group) is delighted to welcome six new mini tots.

We wish all of the new mums big congratulations from everyone at Tots & Co.

Congratulations to...

Pattie Fellowes, on the birth of Oliver on the 30th of November weighing 4.25kg.

Sonia Ruiz on the birth of Lucas on the 10th of October weighing 3.5kg

Robyn Ellis on the birth of Jessica on the 10th of January weighing 3.3kg

Isabelle Malé on the birth of Nora on January 26th weighing 3.27kg

Catherine Bailey on the birth of Rupert on 31st January.

Emma Bertrand on the birth of Raphael on 15th February weighing 2.9kg.



.....IN OTHER NEWS.....

Our newly revamped Friday Funday is a great success, thanks to Carol-Alexander-Reid's careful planning. The morning starts with a welcome song and some Toddler-robics followed by crafts and a story on a different theme each week as well as some time for free play and for mums (or dads or nounous) to chat and have a cup of tea. There are some brand new toys to play with as well as lots of new Little Readers library books to borrow so if you haven't already been you are really missing out!



Our Thursday baby and toddler groups have changed. We will be holding one Baby Tots group a month just for babies (non walking babies up to 15 months) and a separate Toddler Tots group where both toddlers and younger siblings are also welcome once a month. These groups are a great chance to meet



up with other parents and children, either at members' homes or outside at different locations across the Toulouse area. Email Emma Evans on tiddlers.tots@gmail.com for more information.



Photo: Lisa Allen Photography

Vikki Carter-Bordes is hosting Bumps to Babies (Tots and Co's coffee morning for pregnant and new mums) once more. Vikki, mum to Sam, 3, and Lucy, 1, is a former vice president of Tots and returned to work in the Autumn but clearly misses cuddling newborn babies too much so offered to host Bumps to Babies on her day off! Meetings take place about every fortnight alternately at her house in Beauzelle and Charley Sheffield's in Tournefeuille.

And finally, a few lucky members got to go on a Mums' Ski Day to Peyragudes in January. Despite the terrible start to the ski season we had 10cm of fresh snow and beautiful blue skies all day! Another trip is planned for later in the season and it would be great to see skiers and boarders of all levels come along.



LIFE AS A WORKING MUM

BY JENNY DALHUIJSEN

I have a 14-month-old girl and a full-time job at Airbus. I'm the main breadwinner: I managed to stay home until Morgane was six-months-old, but had no choice but to go back then.

I remember when she was three-months-old, I was sitting on the floor in my dressing down, crying because I was so exhausted, and thinking: "Blimey, most French women go back to work at this point!" I found it unimaginable to ever work full-time again.

But when I did go back, I actually felt a huge relief: I finally felt like me again. I had missed the banter at the office and thinking about adult stuff, instead of focussing on my baby all the time, did me good. It is less tiring being at work, definitely! Of course it was hard to leave Morgane at first, but she was in good hands because she was at home with Daddy, who stayed home for the next six months. I would have preferred to go back part-time, but unfortunately with my job this is not an option.

Fast forward eight months and we are both back working full-time and Morgane now goes to a Maison Assistantes Maternelles every day. She is absolutely loving it: they do so many creative things and activities that I could never do with her, she gets to play with other children all the time, and her development has come on in leaps and bounds over the past few months. I really feel that she is better off there during the day than at home, where she would be on her own most of the time, with just her uninspired mum (or dad), and the cats who still haven't decided whether to love her or to hate her.

As for me, I like the mixture of work and parenting. I love my girl, but I've never been a very 'maternal' person and I would not cope well with the stay-at-home-mum life: I need my space and my adult life as well, and especially the interaction with colleagues. And I need the structure: when I'm at home, I struggle to keep a routine going. Work makes me shower and get out the door every day.

But I do often feel I don't spend enough quality time with Morgane: during the week when I'm with her I'm mostly only feeding and dressing/undressing her, some days she's already in bed when I get home, and at the weekend there's also the chores to do.



And I find the days very long: I get up at 6:30am to get her dressed and fed (often having been woken up a couple of times during the night), and then I take her to the MAM before I go to work. I get home around 6:30pm (unless I have to work late), where I have to switch from work mode straight to parent mode again: I do dinner/bath time/bedtime most days. She's usually in bed by around 7:30-8pm and then we still need to eat ourselves. That really only leaves about an hour for couple time, or telly, or relaxing, or catching up with family or social media. Needless to say the house is always messy.

If it's then a period where she wakes up a lot, or I have to work in the evening, it can be very, very hard. I basically don't get a break at all then.

Illness is hard to manage as well: I have quickly learnt that working from home trying to join meetings via teleconferencing with a crying toddler in the background is simply impossible. Meaning that when Morgane is ill and I'm looking after her, I have to inform my colleagues and try to reschedule any meetings. Which does get a bit embarrassing if that happens three times in as many weeks.

So being a working mum means feeling guilty a lot: towards your family, and towards your colleagues. You have to compromise somewhat on both, and especially with no family close by, it can be very challenging. But I strongly believe that both Morgane and myself are happier this way.



LIFE AS A STAY AT HOME MUM

BY EMMA EVANS

Never did I think I would be a stay at home mum (SAHM). Rewind the clock three and a half years and I was a busy social worker who lived for weekends away with friends and relaxing holidays with my husband.

I wasn't ready for children in my twenties and quite frankly after a night of babysitting for my nieces or nephews I couldn't wait to hand them back and was exhausted beyond belief (or so I thought at that time).

Fast forward to 2016 and I'm now a SAHM to two beautiful little girls and I'm absolutely loving every second of this new chapter in my life.

Don't get me wrong, some days I crave my life before children and look at young carefree couples through resentful eyes and reminisce about long lie-ins and leaving the house with a small handbag rather than a rucksack full of nappies, bottles, toys, snacks and spare clothes, but I know I've been given the most amazing opportunity to be able to stay at home and I try to cherish every single day with the girls as I know it won't last forever.

I'm lucky to have witnessed every single milestone, I also get to see their sleepy heads every morning and then tuck them into bed every night. I love the freedom being a SAHM gives us; we can do whatever we like without loads of advanced planning, whether it's meeting up with friends, days out or just a simple walk to the park, but there's no pressure for us to do anything if we want a day at home too. When illness strikes in the Evans household we lock the door and stay in our pyjamas and not having the pressure of work after a sleepless night is a godsend.

The downside to being a SAHM is that some days it feels like Groundhog Day. My world is consumed with nappies, baby wipes, tears and snot. I'm constantly having to think about the next toddler-friendly meal or fun things to do to entertain without always calling on my new friends Peppa, Sooty and Ben & Holly! I'm not naturally creative so I find this part of parenting difficult but I'm learning. In fact I think I've forgotten what it's like to use my brain for 'real' things!

I also miss the normality that having a job brings, for example showering and washing my hair (some days I don't even brush my hair?!), having a lunch 'hour' (I wish) and going to the toilet without a small person or dog following me is a distant dream. I feel I've lost part of my identity as Emma and now I'm just 'Mummy'.



Adjusting to not working was much harder than I expected and it wasn't until I had Lucie that I felt I could actually justify staying at home. I felt lazy, useless and worthless, which was really difficult to overcome. Having a close network of friends here in similar positions has helped with this but I still feel judged and find myself saying: 'I'm just a Mum,' when people ask if I work. I do love staying at home though and don't know how working parents find the time to fit anything else into their week. I have the utmost respect for all working parents out there!

Part time crèche and school now provide a welcome break for me and there's a glimmer of hope that one day Emma will reappear, albeit an older, jaded version of her former self but definitely a happier, calmer person all thanks to two little people that have changed my life for the better.

WHAT'S ON

BY CHARLEY SHEFFIELD

MARCH

OEUVRES CONTEES: 1, 2, 3 COMPTEZ AU BOIS!

Musee des Augustins, 21 rue de Metz,
Toulouse
2nd March
From €4
Fun guided tours of the museum for
two-seven-year-olds.
Reservations 05 61 22 39 03

SOUNOU ET LA FORET MAGIQUE

Peniche Didascalie, Place du Canal,
31520 Ramonville Saint Agne
3-6th March
From €6
Theatre for children from two years
old set in Africa with music, dance and
songs.
www.penichedidascalie.com

T'CHOUPI

Theatre de la Barriere, Ile de Ramier,
Toulouse
20th March
From €19-€36
Musical show featuring the popular
French character from books and car-
toons.

MEME PAS FAIM!

Theatre du Grand Rond, 23 rue des Po-
tiers, Toulouse
30th March – 9th April on Wednesdays
and Saturdays at 1500.
From €4,50 - €6
Puppet show featuring different animals
with jazz music. For three-seven-year-
olds.

AKIKO, COMPAGNIE LES TRIGO- NELLES

Odyssud, Blagnac
30th March at 1700 followed by a gouter
From €6-€10.
Colourful shadow theatre set in Japan
about a little girl living at the foot of
Mount Fuji. For children from three-
years-old.
www.odyssud.com

WHAT'S ON

APRIL

LE SALON BABY

Parc des Expositions, Toulouse
9-11th April

This takes place within the Foire Internationale de Toulouse. It features advice and information for expectant parents as well as parents of babies and young children with stalls and demonstrations on all aspects of childcare.

www.foiredetoulouse.com

POPI LE POISSON N'A PAS DE MAISON

Theatre de la Violette, 67 chemin Pujibet
Toulouse

17th-24th April, everyday at 1100.

Children's theatre – a little girl receives a goldfish for her birthday, but now she has to find him a home. For children from six-months to six-years-old.

www.theatredelaviolette.com

AGATHE ET LA FABRIKADO

Theatre Grand Rond, Toulouse
26th April – 7th May (Tuesday 26th-Saturday 3th at 1100 and 1500 and Wednesday 4th and Saturday 7th May at 1500)

From €4,50-€6

A little girl escapes to an imaginary world after being sent to her room as punishment.

www.grand-rond.org

MAY

LE LIVRE VOYAGEUR

Theatre du Grand Rond

11th-28th May on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 1500.

€4,50-€6

Theatre featuring three stories from Russia, Lebanon and Japan. For three to eight-year-olds.

FESTIVAL SIGN'O

La Grainerie/Arts du Cirque, 61 rue Saint-Jean, 31130 Balma

13th – 15th May

Over three days, this unique festival will bring the visual arts sign language users. It is open to both deaf and hearing spectators alike and features theatre, dance, poetry and more.

www.festival-signo.fr

FESTIVAL LULUBERLU

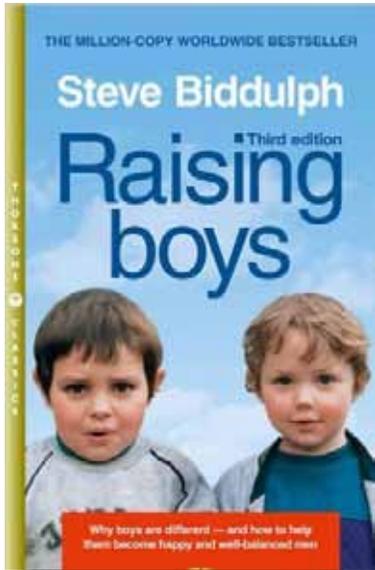
Odysud, Blagnac

25th-29th May

This year the family-friendly festival is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

www.festival-luluberlu.fr

book review BY ROBYN ELLIS



“ Raising Boys – Why Boys are Different and How to Help Them Become Happy and Well-Balanced Men by Steve Biddulph ”

If you want to understand boys better, this is a good parenting book. Whether you are pregnant with a boy, already have a boy or of course are father to a boy, then this is definitely worth a read.

Some of it can be taken with a pinch of salt because I feel that the author, Australian psychologist Steve Biddulph, has written this book from the perspective of a much older generation.

The most important message I got from this book is about the great importance of a father's role in the upbringing of their children, particularly boys. However, I find these days that most 21st century dads are much more involved with the day-to-day routine of the children than perhaps they were 40 years ago.

There are several references to scientific research throughout the book to help parents understand how levels of testosterone can affect our boys in ways that, especially as a woman, we may find hard to comprehend. The book talks about language development and how boys and girls differ developmentally and how they learn best about communication and the world and everything in it. To some it is just common sense but others may find the advice interesting and surprising. The book also emphasises how important our role as mother is in helping our boys understand their feelings and emotions.

I liked the book more the second time I read it. It reminded me of some of the challenges or phases I might face while bringing up my son Harrison. You can start mentally preparing yourself for situations, discuss them with your partner if you have one, and start imagining how you might handle them, which is a lot easier than suddenly being panicked to make parenting decisions in a flash without really thinking it through.

Given Biddulph's perspective about being a dad you can tell this book was written 20 years ago as I feel society in general has come a long way in terms of a father's role and involvement, especially since I was a child. Some of his ideas you may have to take with a pinch of salt.

On the whole I enjoyed reading this book and found the information and various research really interesting. It really does give you (especially if you are a mother reading this) an insight into why boys may be very different to girls and how to raise them and nurture them (especially their rather more boisterous side) and also to accept it and not try to stamp it out, just channel it. I certainly do not agree with everything in the book so as long as you can just skip or ignore some of it then I would recommend it, especially as it can be read in a week or so.

Steve Biddulph

- Australian author, activist and psychologist.
- Has written many influential books on parenting and boys' education, of which Raising Boys is his most famous.
- Argues for a more affectionate and connected form of parenting and emphasises the importance of role models in children's lives.
- Believes boys in particular do not do well in collective childcare, particularly before the age of three, and argues for delaying the age at which children start school.

focus on... FERTILITY



In our new series, Focus On, we will be looking at a different health issue each edition with the help of Tots & Co's medical expert, Dr Danielle Davidson.

AT TOTS we are all, despite our many differences, united by a common fact; once upon a time we got pregnant and had a baby. Without exception each of us experienced that moment of discovery, spent numerous months turning cells into a human and then within an instant, graduated from unfettered freedom to parenthood: all quite an achievement.

But that is as far as our commonality takes us because not one of us travelled the same path to bring our babies into existence. For some the journey was straightforward, joyful. For others it was complicated and fraught with anxiety. And yet, how do we know?

For whilst we are often happy to share stories of pregnancy and labour, one aspect of the baby experience so rarely discussed is indisputably the most fundamental; getting pregnant in the first place.

Now I'll admit I was fertility confident. I went to the gym, ate my five a day and I could still tick the perky 25 to 29 age range box on questionnaires. So when we fell pregnant after the first month of trying I wasn't surprised. We hadn't relied on an ovulation kit or done any complicated menstrual math, we simply did the one thing you're told to and we did it a lot.

This naïve self-assurance was based on two distinct factors: biology and statistics. Once you decide to start a family the terrifying warning of your teenage years becomes the very foundation of reproductive advice; have lots of unprotected sex, get pregnant. I knew that in doing exactly this 84% of couples like me would conceive within the first year. I liked those odds. Furthermore, when I had my eldest I was one of the first amongst my family and friends. My exposure to discouraging fertility war stories was limited. Consequently I skipped towards baby making with a foolish idealistic innocence.

However, in the three years since having my children I have lost count of the number of couples I know for whom fertility has been and still is a complex and often traumatic experience. I have held babies born after multiple rounds of IVF and held the hands of friends who remain unsuccessful despite years of trying. I am sad to say I came to these discoveries late. Many only shared their stories of infertility after a successful pregnancy or following months and months of painful disappointment and intrusive medical procedures.



I understand that it is an intensely personal journey and for many not a topic for general conversation but are we cloaking in shame an issue that is surprisingly common?

Infertility is a scary word but one that is frequently misunderstood. In medical terms it does not mean sterile or barren but instead refers to a couple that have yet to conceive after one year of having regular unprotected sex. Looking back at the 84% that means 1 in every 6 couples doing what they are supposed to do and still not getting pregnant. Even more sobering are the statistics that follow; 92% of couples will conceive within two years and only 93% within three. Turned on its head, 7 out of 100 couples will still be childless after thirty-six hard months of trying.

Infertility can be primary, where someone who has never conceived a child has difficulty conceiving, or secondary, where a person has difficulty conceiving again. In the UK it is recommended that a couple visit their doctor after a year of trying without success or sooner if the woman is over 36. In 75% of cases a cause can be found ranging from lack of regular ovulation to poor quality of semen but for a quarter of couples the frustrating diagnosis is one of unexplained infertility. Medical and surgical treatments are available to those with an identifiable cause with assisted conception a possibility for those who qualify. So taking all this into account shouldn't we be talking about this more?

The author of the Unexpected Father blog believes so. Chronicling with refreshing honesty his battle with infertility he writes: "Here's the thing - I don't want sympathy - I don't want tips on what positions, or times of day, or diets, or weird chants have worked to get you pregnant - I just want to be able to talk openly about something that has been a huge part of our lives."

Perhaps what we need is a move from the 'have sex, get pregnant' stories to a more open discourse on the realities of fertility. The alarmist rhetoric we heard as teenagers needs to evolve as we reach an age when we want to start a family. It is at this point that we should be 're-educated' on the truths of reproduction; infertility is common and making a baby can be hard. If we normalise these difficulties the result would likely be a more realistic appreciation of fertility enabling us to share and support without shame or unease.

Since having my daughters I have come to realise that falling pregnant so easily was neither ordinary nor predictable, it was in both cases a small miracle. As one of the fortunate few I have no fertility war story. But for those who do, and there are many, the conversations should be had sooner and not only once the suffering has outlived its silence. In the meantime I plan to keep holding hands and hopefully, babies too.

DISCLAIMER

All information in this Newsletter is entirely the view or opinion of the author. It is advisable that you verify any information from this Newsletter before relying on it.

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THE ENGLISH FAIR

BY KATIE TOLCHINSKY

Block your diaries! On Sunday 22 May 10h-16h, come and support The English Fair at Espace Job, 105 Route de Blagnac, 31200 Toulouse!

Celebrating the English language for native speakers and those who want to learn English, this is a Tots organised event.

Fancy a singalong in English for the little ones, a story telling, dance shows, music performances, artisan stalls, a Great British Bake Off competition, English books, tombola, raffle and lots more, there is no better way to spend your Sunday.

And there will be a feast for your tastebuds too! Burgers, salads and in the true style of British Summer Time, what better excuse than to have an English tea - strawberries and cream, along with a sneaky Pimms!

However, to make this event a success we need you! While the core team is led by Helen Saks, Katie Tolchinsky and Jacqueline Glanville, we simply cannot do it alone. Whether you can help to decorate the hall, run an art activity, the cafe, the Bake Off, the raffle, setting up, or helping to run the Tots stall your help will be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us, or if you would like to take a stand to advertise your business at the event.

Our email is englishfirtoulouse2016@gmail.com. We thank you very sincerely in advance for helping to make this event a success. It's a team effort!

All proceeds from the event will go to the Tots chosen charity Association Dominique.

More information will be published shortly.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

BY CHARLEY SHEFFIELD

L'Amphitryon

Chemin de Gramont, 31770 Colomiers.
05 61 15 55 55.



As Michelin starred restaurants go, I doubt there are many that can boast an extensive view of the Airbus factory site on the road leading up to the venue.

This incongruous scene aside, the restaurant is in fact as luxurious as you might expect, with the intimate dining room secreted away behind thick velvet curtains. A series of sliding doors means the inevitable large corporate groups from Airbus can be thoughtfully tucked away in their own semi-private corner.

Going out to eat at a Michelin starred restaurant isn't an everyday occurrence, and so it was a special birthday treat to be taken to L'Amphitryon in Colomiers.

Places like this can be intimidating, but the service was wonderful and every member of staff made an effort to put us at ease.

We quickly flicked past the 165 euro menu *grande dégustation* and selected the slightly more affordable menu *par amour du goût*, which offered four courses for 96 euro, along with a glass of white *Alsatian* wine to accompany the starter and fish courses and red *La Clape AOC* for the meat course and dessert.

As soon as we had ordered we were delivered a selection of *amuse bouche* before the starter of *foie gras* arrived. I was slightly underwhelmed to have to order *foie gras* when it features on every single menu in the south of France, but this was totally different and came within a case made from strands of Swiss Chard along with some smoked herring. Next was monkfish with salsify and kumquats followed by roast squab (pigeon) and a dessert that can best be described as '50 million ways with a clementine'. The absolute highlight was the *petits fours* that came after dessert however – the flavour of one made from banana and Szechuan pepper was the most extraordinary thing I have ever tasted.

In total the bill came to less than 250 euro, which makes it a very special treat but excellent value in my opinion.



aeroscopia

Fly, my pretties!

Visiting Aeroscopia on a sunny Sunday in January we pulled into a very quiet car park just in front of the open air tarmac section of the museum where Concorde and A400M sit waiting.

Reception is grand and glass with a seating area and vending machines but prices are reasonable with children under six going free and a pre-bought Airbus discounted adult ticket costing 9.50 euro (11.50 euro standard price on the door).

With our oldest not yet three-years-old we expected, as we usually do in museums, to take the express route but surprisingly two hours later we were still airplane spotting.

The aeronautical museum is one of the newest editions to Toulouse's already aviation-rich culture. Built just north of Blagnac at the birthplace of the A380, a 7,000 m² exhibition hall has been designed to house a collection of legendary aircraft and chart the city's role within the history of air travel.

Aeroscopia has obviously tried hard to appeal to all ages. Lifts are available and the visit is very pram-friendly and there is plenty to look at and explore for younger children who won't stop and read. Although the museum is essentially a large industrial hangar everything is well organised and modern. Do bear in mind though that because of its size the museum is not heated so in colder months you need to remember to wrap up warm.

The tour starts along an illuminated tunnel, which brings you out onto the main museum gallery balcony. Directly in front you stare down the cavernous cargo bay of a Super Guppy which can be accessed to watch a video chronicling Toulouse's aviation past. Unfortunately with younger children there is little chance to enjoy the vast amount of information available on the 58-metre timeline especially when standing on the five metre high balcony, which overlooks the aircraft display hangar.

From the balcony you cross a bridge and board a Concorde and then A300B, which my daughter loved. She was fascinated by the glass floor, which looks down into the electrics and baggage hold. You can view the cockpit through transparent panels and the planes have been redesigned to show a variety of seating options.

On the ground floor of the hangar there is no set route around the planes and helicopters and you can walk freely underneath many and get close enough to touch. My daughter could tear around without causing too much of a nuisance which enabled her to keep interest longer than in other museums. From this floor you can access the open air tarmac seen from the carpark.

The small collection of interactive exhibitions at the back of the hangar are great for older children and adults but the majority were swiftly passed through by my daughter. She did however enjoy the touch screen 'build a plane' and the flight control simulator seat. Her favourite though was the 'igloo' style pod showing an animated film about what air travel may be like in the future. The museum wasn't busy and we were mostly families but we accessed everything without waiting which helps when you have an attention span-limited two-year-old.

I will admit I was sceptical about taking our daughter even though she enjoys playing planes at home but we had a really enjoyable morning and she is still talking about what she saw. For children (or adults even) with a keen interest in aerospace Aeroscopia is a real must whilst in Toulouse.



CAFE REVIEW

BY CHARLEY SHEFFIELD

La Paulette

12 rue Chrestias, 31770 Colomiers.
07 81 72 89 34.



Family-friendly cafes seem to pop up regularly in the Toulouse area. Sadly they also seem to close down regularly too.

I'm sure the main reason so many seem unable to make it financially viable is down to the small number of stay-at-home-mothers/fathers able to regularly use such a venue – most people seem to return to work fairly quickly.

But, in my experience, the café-owners also never quite find the balance between an affordable, relaxed place you can let your child roam around in, and a more formal space where children are expected to behave like adults and sit down for the entire duration of lunch and, if workshops are going on, to sit and listen like university students.

I tried to visit La Paulette once before, but when I arrived to meet my friend for lunch only a few weeks after it opened, I was turned away as I hadn't reserved. It was unclear whether all the tables were booked or if there simply wasn't enough food.

So this time I was prepared and called ahead to reserve. I mentioned that my son has an egg allergy and spent the next 10 minutes on the phone going through possibilities with the owner. When I arrived, I found they had prepared a special cheese and ham crepe without eggs, along with carrot sticks and (egg-free) dip, which was very thoughtful. There were only two options for adults: saucisses aux lentilles or quiche broccoli et lait de coco (broccoli and coconut milk quiche). Both were delicious and we followed them with passion fruit meringue tart and chocolate cake, which were divine.

While we waited for the food to arrive, the children played in the little aire de jeux, which had plenty of beautiful, mainly wooden, toys and puzzles to keep them amused. There is also an area reserved for over-4s, with books, comics, magazines and board games. Being family-friendly, there was obviously a baby-changing station with a cupboard underneath containing any essentials you might have forgotten.

With an excellent outdoor playground with swings in the park opposite and plentiful on-street parking available nearby, La Paulette is in a perfect location and it would be a real shame to see another family-friendly café close through under-use so do visit if you can.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: NEW MEMBERS

Clare Blanc

What brings you to Toulouse?

I came to France as a child as my Dad works for Airbus. So I lived in France from the age of two until 18 with a two-year gap at age six. I went back to the UK at 18 for 10 years.

How long have you been here and for how long will you stay?

I came back four years ago. We are here for the foreseeable future.

Tell us about your family

My husband is French and we have a daughter who is 18 months old and baby number 2 is due in June.

What did you do before motherhood/ what do you do now?

I was an ICU nurse in the UK and in France I now look after my daughter.

What do you do in your free time?

I love crafts; I do patchwork quilting and crochet. I also love to bake and decorate cakes.

What are your favourite things about France?

The people, the space, the countryside, skiing, the food; lots of things, it's great here

What do you miss about "home" and what noticeable differences do you find between France and your home country?

I guess France is my home county now. I miss friends and family in the UK but I am happy here.



spring bunnies

YOU WILL NEED:

Empty toilet rolls
Coloured card
Patterned paper
White paper
Googly eyes
Mini pompoms
PVA glue
Black pen
Double sided sticky tape

HOW TO MAKE:

1. Cut the coloured card to the height of the toilet roll and long enough to be able to wrap it around the tube with a small overlap. Use the card to cover the roll using the double-sided sticky tape to secure in place.
2. Using the same coloured card cut two long ear shapes. Cut two smaller ear shapes from the patterned paper - these will be the inner ears.
3. Glue to patterned inner ears on to the ears. Glue the ears onto the inside of the covered toilet roll
4. Now to make the face. Stick on two googly eyes and a small pompom for the nose. From the white paper cut some rabbit teeth, and glue in place. Using the black pen draw on the whiskers and mouth.

coffee filter butterflies

YOU WILL NEED:

2 round coffee filters
Wooden clothes peg
Pipe cleaner
Water-based felt-tip pens
Small spray bottle filled with water



HOW TO MAKE:

1. Let your child decorate one side of each of the coffee filters using the felt-tip pens. Bold strong colours will produce the best end results.
2. The fun bit! Hold up the decorated coffee filter and spray it with water. Let your child watch the colours spread and run together.
3. Once the filters are dry, concertina fold each filter and fold the two of them together by pinching them together in the centre and secure them with the clothes peg. Gently open the filters into the four wings of the butterfly.
4. Finally add the antennae by wrapping the pipe cleaner around the top of the back section of the clothes peg and softly curling the ends.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: NEW MEMBERS

Freya Gnam

What brings you to Toulouse?

We came to Toulouse for my job with Airbus.

How long have you been here and for how long will you stay?

We are living in Blagnac since September 2014 and really enjoy it. We might go back to Hamburg one day, but there are no plans yet.



Tell us about your family

In our little family there's my husband Stephan, our son Yannick who was born in September, and me.

What did you do before motherhood/ what do you do now?

I am working as business controller for Airbus. After maternity leave I went back to work and my husband is now taking care of our baby.

What do you do in your free time?

I am an amateur photographer and since recently my favourite subject is... babies.

What are your favourite things about France?

As a family we like to explore the surroundings of Toulouse and I always take my camera along. I also love watching movies and used to be head of our university's cinema.

What do you miss about "home" and what noticeable differences do you find between France and your home country?

What I really like about France is l'art de vivre... good food and spending time with family and friends are highly valued. In general people are really relaxed and friendly in this region of France. I am also a fan of French cinema and literature.

I started baking my own whole wheat bread when coming here - bread is one of the things probably every German misses when leaving their country. I also miss vegetarian food options in restaurants and advent time is not quite the same as back home.