

HOME HELP.

Years of struggling with almost endless paraphernalia for picnics on the beach – most of it totally unnecessary – have made Hugh St Clair an expert in the essentials for the perfect British holiday

THE GIRL GUIDE MOTTO 'BE PREPARED' sets the agenda for the English summer. On a trip to the beach it could be blazing sunshine one minute, then dark clouds, huge drops of rain and a gale the next.

After years of dragging quantities of bags to the beach or being squashed in the back of my parents' Ford Cortina surrounded by endless paraphernalia that was not always needed for our holidays in Scotland, I have come to know what is essential for a happy British holiday and what isn't.

Things that are adaptable, fold up small and are easy to carry, always make travelling more pleasant. A rug with a waterproof backing and a handle fulfils these requirements. Asda and Homebase both have very smart plaid rugs with carrying handles (about 150cm x 125cm) from around £7. John Lewis also has a fun, decoloured Union Flag picnic blanket (£12), and online company The Gifted Penguin has a rainforest waterproof picnic blanket decorated with flowers (£12.99). It also sells a four-person backpack picnic set (£29.99) with separate food and drinks compartments in the same design. According to The Gifted Penguin's founder, Debra Baker-Heriot, the company aims to carry gifts and accessories by small companies not normally found in the high street and a catalogue will be coming soon.

New at Emma Bridgewater are smart plastic tumblers with a raised design in lime green, turquoise and purple (£4.95). In addition, its ever popular designs Black Toast and Polka Dot are now available in melamine, with prices starting at £8 for bowls.

To save you having to drag heavy and cumbersome wind-breaks down to the beach, Kiddymania, which specialises in children's clobber, sells a neat little contraption called a Foldabrella. It's a tasteful blue sunshade that can be pitched at an angle to serve as a windbreak and folds up small so it can be carried in a tiny pouch. To find it, go to the Kiddymania website

and scroll down the pink and purple left-hand menu offering dolls and children's fancy dress until you reach 'Quick Find', then type in Foldabrella.

So now everything's neatly packed, just leaving room for children and dogs, but more often than not, you're minus a present for the family you are going to stay with or at least call in to see en route. There are more and more gift shops springing up on the internet, often run by mothers of young children in an attempt to

manage the work/life balance more effectively. Interiors at Tides has a very stylish and interesting collection of presents. For outdoor eating there are pierced zinc lanterns (£13.50 for a set of three), a white-painted picnic hamper for two (£45), and a large red tin hamper called the Blyton (£72), presumably after Enid, which comes ready stocked with plates, crockery and insulated food coolers.

Traditional white enamel jugs (£19) and enamel kitchen utensils (from £8) would make most hostesses very happy, while your host will be more than likely to appreciate a doorstop made from artfully wound manila rope. For the children, I liked the small collage boats and beach huts in frames that can be personalised with the recipient's name. ♦

ASDA (www.asda.co.uk).

EMMA BRIDGEWATER
(020-7371 5264; www.emmabridgewater.co.uk).

HOMEBASE (0845-077 8888;
www.homebase.co.uk).

INTERIORS AT TIDES
(01625-578105; www.interiors-tides.co.uk).

JOHN LEWIS (08456-049049;
www.johnlewis.com).

KIDDYMANIA (01455-615804; www.kiddymania.co.uk).

THE GIFTED PENGUIN (01642-763000; www.giftedpenguin.co.uk).

IF YOU HAVE ANY DECORATING, design or general enquiries about your house, email Hugh St Clair at homehelp@lady.co.uk. Although he cannot guarantee to answer every query personally, he will endeavour to print answers to a selection of them.



The Blyton vintage hamper



Enamel jugs from Interiors at Tides