



# Junior suites

Babies and toddlers sleep best in familiar surroundings, but a well-designed travel cot can work almost as well as their own bed on holiday. We compare traditional and lightweight cots

Taking a baby or toddler on holiday can be a real challenge, not least because of the amount of extra clothes, toys and emergency supplies needed to keep junior happy while you are away.

Packing your own travel cot adds extra baggage but if it guarantees a good night's sleep for all the family, it's well worth it. The challenge lies in finding a cot that will suit both you and your baby.

A traditional travel cot provides a sturdy place for your baby or toddler to sleep – and stops them wandering off in unfamiliar surroundings. It can often be used as a playpen, so it will be useful at home, too. Our test of the cots offered by the major brands shows that they share many common features, but our Best Buys distinguish themselves by being particularly easy to use or by having lots of handy accessories.

**Our Best Buys are particularly easy to use or have many handy accessories**

Even the best traditional cots have inherent drawbacks, though – they all take up a lot of space in the car and can put a strain on your back as you lift your child into and out of them.

Since our last tests, a new generation of lightweight travel cots has been launched that is aimed at parents who can't face lugging a traditional cot around.

We were keen to test them, to see how they would match up against traditional designs, but found that none was as comfortable or easy to use as our Best Buy traditional cots. They proved to be awkward and tiresome to erect and hard to pack away – and some appeared rather flimsy too. What's more, many can be used only for a short period of the baby's life and none of those that we've looked at can double up as a playpen. For the results of our tests, see p66.

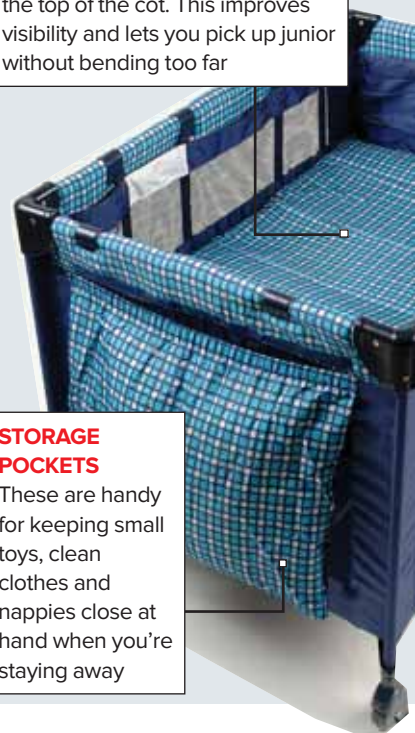
## What you should

### BASSINET

A useful additional crib for young babies up to 6.5kg, which fits over the top of the cot. This improves visibility and lets you pick up junior without bending too far

### STORAGE POCKETS

These are handy for keeping small toys, clean clothes and nappies close at hand when you're staying away



## How to buy

### Shopping tips for cot buyers

**TRY IT OUT** If you are buying a new cot from a high-street store, ask to see it being assembled and try carrying the packed cot around for a few minutes. If you're an internet shopper, be prepared to hunt for bargains. Price-comparison websites are little help in this area as they offer too many unrelated products for you to trawl through, rather than a concise list of suppliers and prices.

**SECOND-HAND** If you buy a second-hand cot, check it has the original instructions and is labelled as complying with BS EN 716: 1996 and/or BS 7423: 1999. Check there are no holes in the mattress and that it fits the cot. For safety, the mattress top should be at least 50cm below the top rail of the cot.

## Facts & scores

### News from our tests

#### Play time?

A travel cot should be used as a playpen only if, as is the case with our Best Buys, the instructions say it can be used in this way.

#### Light but limited

The Graco Petite Bassinet was the smallest travel cot on test – and the second lightest. But you can't use it once babies can sit, kneel or pull themselves up, so you'll get less use from it than most other cots.

MODEL		SPECIFICATION		
		PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm) (h x w x d)	WEIGHT (NEAREST 0.1kg)
1	<b>LITTLE SHIELD</b> Travel Centre	59	76x72x103	13.6
2	<b>GRACO</b> Compact Travel Cot	40	80x72x104	9.8
3	<b>COSATTO</b> Solaris On the Move Bassinette	65	79x76x105	10.4
4	<b>MAMAS &amp; PAPAS</b> Classic Travel Cot	50	78x75x105	9.4
5	<b>BABYDAN</b> Travel Cot Easy'n'Lite	70	82x73x129	10.7
6	<b>GRACO</b> Contour Electra	100	76x73x102	13.7
7	<b>GRACO</b> Petite Bassinet Travel Crib	48	73x59x84	8.9
8	<b>MOTHERCARE</b> Castlerock Travel Cot	50	75x74x104	8.4
9	<b>CHICCO</b> Caddy Travel Bed	50	72x68x128	11.3
10	<b>HAUCK</b> Dream'n'Play	50	77x65x127	11
11	<b>GRACO</b> Contour Bassinet	68	78x75x104	13.9

### USING THE TABLE

We tested new and best-selling cots from widely available brands. The more stars the better.

### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price

## look for

**HANDLES/WHEELS**

Look for cots whose wheels or carry-handles protrude when they're folded, as these make them easier to shift around

**CHANGING TABLE**

A useful accessory, but it will add to the weight and bulkiness of the packed travel cot and means it will take longer to assemble

**62% Little Shield Travel Centre £59**

You'll have the best-accessorised baby in town with this cot, which comes with both a changing table and a bassinet. It has four mesh sides, two lockable wheels and two useful storage pockets. A roll-down blind is also available as an optional extra. The recommended weight limit is 14kg for children and the maximum height is 85cm, so it should be suitable

**WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY**

for most toddlers up to two years old. Erecting and dismantling the Little Shield is easy, but it is heavier than our other Best Buy. It's available online from Debenhams and preciouslittleone.com, and from Freemans and Grattan.

**WE LIKE** The changing table is useful for children up to 11kg.

**Cheapest online price** Debenhams, preciouslittleone.com **Weight** 13.6kg **Packed size** 24x24x77cm **Erect size** 76x72x103cm (hxxwxd) **Colour** Blue check

**61% Graco Compact Travel Cot £40**

The Graco Compact was the easiest cot to erect in our tests. The locking mechanism is simple to operate and requires little force to engage or release, and the whole cot packs away well too. It also proved to be well constructed and sturdy.

Like the Little Shield, it should be suitable for most toddlers up to two years old.

**WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY**

The Graco Compact is available from Argos, Mothercare and Toys R Us.

**WORTH KNOWING** The mattress and top rails are easy to clean with a sponge.

**Cheapest stores** Argos, Mothercare, Toys R Us **Weight** 9.75kg **Packed size** 24x25x80cm **Erect size** 80x72x104cm (hxxwxd) **Colours** Jean Jeanie, primary, toy trucks



FEATURES					WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE										SCORE %
BASSINET	CHANGING STATION	USE AS PLAYPEN	NUMBER OF POCKETS ON COT	NUMBER OF MESH SIDES	INSTRUCTIONS	ERECTING	DISMANTLING	WEIGHT AND BULKINESS	MOVING - FOLDED	MOVING - ERECTED	EASE OF ACCESS	FEATURES	COMFORT		
✓	✓	✓	2	4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	62	
		✓		4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	61	
✓	✓		1	2	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	58	
		✓		4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	58	
		✓	1	3	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	57	
✓	✓	✓		4	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	57	
✓				4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	57	
		✓		4	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	57	
		✓		4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	56	
		✓		2	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	56	
✓	✓	✓		4	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	53	

as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you can expect to pay on the high street.

Online prices are in *italics*.

It's also worth checking out prices on specialist baby care websites.

**Test performance**

Our performance ratings were decided by a laboratory panel of five experienced travel cot users.

**Score** Ignores price and is based on:

Convenience **75%**  
Features **20%**  
Carry-bag strength **5%**

## How we test

Each of the traditional cots was put through a battery of British and European standard tests to check they were well constructed and free from hazards. The same tests were applied to the lightweight cots where this was appropriate

### Climbing hazards

We use a special foothold template to check the inside and the outside of the cots, its fabric sides and accessories, to ensure there is nothing that will help a determined toddler climb out.

### Choking hazards

We check that there are no detachable or easily breakable parts, labels or loose lining fabrics in the cot that a toddler could choke on.

### Build quality

We carry out several tests to check that a cot is robust and stable. We check that lockable wheels stay locked, for example, when the cot is pushed or pulled, and that it can't be tipped over by a two-year-old toddler clinging to the outside. We also simulate a child pushing at the cot from the inside to further check its stability.

## Contacts

**Babydan**  
www.babydan.com

**Chicco**  
01623 750870  
www.chicco.co.uk

**Cosatto**  
0870 050 5900  
www.cosatto.com

**Graco**  
0870 909 0501  
www.graco.co.uk

**Hauck**  
0870 840 6727  
www.hauck-group.de/en

**Little Life**  
0118 981 1433

www.littlelife.co.uk

**Little Shield**  
01462 484 858  
www.littleshield.com

**Mamas & Papas**  
0870 830 7700  
www.mamasandpapas.co.uk

**Mothercare**  
08453 30 40 30  
www.mothercare.com

**Nomad**  
01404 815 555  
www.nomad.info/uk

**Samsonite**  
01746 769676  
www.baby-travel.com

## Lightweight cots on test

The new pop-up and tent-style cots are easier for parents to carry, but are less comfy for babies

### Pop-up cots

Because of their incredible lightness – they weigh less than a kilo – pop-up cots are more convenient for the parent but in our view are less comfortable for the child. We tested the **Little Life Compact Travel Bed (£25)** and the **Samsonite Pop-up Travel Cot Deluxe (£35)** and felt that neither was very sturdy. The price tags may look cheap but these cots can be used only until a baby can sit up, which gives them a limited life span compared with more traditional travel cots. The thick mesh front on the Little Life cot also makes it hard to keep an eye on junior.

Both of these models spring open fairly viciously when you remove them from their bag and are fiendishly difficult to get back in until you learn the knack. They both have a soft padded quilt rather than a proper mattress, which makes it difficult to keep any bedding firmly tucked in under them.

Samsonite recognises this disadvantage and also produces a deluxe mattress (£25) with fitted cotton sheets that packs into its own carry case, but this adds 70 per cent to the cost of the cot. If you don't pay the extra £25, you'd probably want to add another layer of insulation before putting the cot on the floor to make your child comfortable. Putting a baby to sleep in one of these on anything other than the floor is not really an option in our view, as they can be moved very easily – possibly by their occupant – so there is a risk of accidents if they are set up

on a raised surface. The fly screen on the Samsonite cot needs to be tucked into its pocket when not in use, to avoid it dangling into the cot.

### Pop-up bubble

Pop-up bubble cots are also available. We tested the **Samsonite Pop-up Bubble (£50)**. This 2.3kg cot, which is designed for children up to 18 months old, is the best of the pop-up cots we've looked at and the only one offering comfort comparable to that of a traditional travel cot. However, it is no cheaper than many traditional cots and children will outgrow it six months earlier than either of our Best Buys. It's also worth noting that its carry-bag is twice the size of the other pop-ups.

The lip on the cot we tested was low enough for children to roll out when the side is left open, reducing security – Samsonite tells us it will be increasing the height of the lip this year.

### Tent-style cots

We found that tent-style travel cots are the hardest to use of all those we looked at. They are also more expensive. We tested the **Nomad Kids Travel Bed (£80 online)** and **Little Life Twin-Arc Travel Cot (£80 online)**. They take up more floor space than a normal travel cot and are hard to erect. You really need two people for this and threading the poles can be time-consuming. Little Life tells us it has now made the poles slightly smaller on its cot to make putting it up easier.



Little Life  
Compact  
Travel Bed



Samsonite  
Pop-up  
Travel Cot  
Deluxe



Samsonite  
Pop-up  
Bubble



Nomad  
Kids Travel  
Bed



Little Life  
Twin-Arc  
Travel Cot