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FLIP ISSUE

Holidays with kids

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Electric avenue

Why diesel-loving mum Meg Law changed her mind about EV road trips.



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I'll admit it: I was sceptical. As someone who has spent years crunching through Australia's red dirt in an old diesel-chugging manual Land Rover Defender, I never imagined I'd voluntarily swap over to what I jokingly called "the dark side".

Living on Victoria's Great Ocean Road, our trusty Defender has carried us across beaches, deserts and outback tracks on adventures including a half lap of Australia, usually with two kids and our golden retriever in tow. It's loud, unapologetically old-school and guzzles diesel like it's going out of fashion.

I'm also the person who waves at every Defender that passes, so driving an EV felt a little bit like betraying the tribe. I'd assumed EVs were for city slickers, not families who live for road trips. So, when I climbed behind the wheel of an electric SUV to test drive the Hyundai Elexio Elite for a few weeks, I wasn't expecting a conversion.

I had pictured range anxiety, complex charging, endless planning and a trip constantly interrupted by battery stops.

Instead, somewhere between our first charge and our destination, I realised I'd been looking at EV travel all wrong.

The unexpected detour

The biggest surprise wasn't driving the car; it was the way it changed the journey. The Hyundai Elexio Elite comfortably fitted our family of four, Captain the golden retriever and all our luggage, which for a family of serial overpackers was a bonus.

Charging quickly became part of the adventure rather than an inconvenience. Instead of a quick pitstop at a servo, filling up and racing off again, we'd plug the car in, grab a coffee or milkshake, let the kids stretch their legs, wander through a local town, discover a market or a hidden laneway or walk down to the river or beach. By the time everyone was ready to hit the road again, so was the car.

It forced us to slow down in the best possible way. Even driving felt calmer. The silence inside the luxe cabin was almost surreal compared to our Defender's familiar diesel rumble. With reclining leather seats, an oversized touchscreen LCD and a heated steering wheel, it was giving serious Gold Class vibes and within minutes everyone (including our usually overexcited goldie) had settled into holiday mode.

The apps that made it easier

Once I'd downloaded a handful of apps, everything became surprisingly simple. PlugShare became my go-to for finding chargers across every network, while ABRP (A Better Route Planner) removed the guesswork by calculating where to stop, how long to charge and how much battery we'd have left. Although, if I'm honest, we preferred to wing it and simply use it when needed.

For charging itself, I mainly relied on Chargefox, Evie Charging and Exploren. Having all three downloaded



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meant we were covered almost everywhere we travelled.

Australia's charging network has grown so much that there are fast chargers now popping up throughout regional towns, highway stops and major tourist destinations. A little planning helps, but it's nowhere near as daunting as I'd imagined.

Is it cheaper?

One of the biggest surprises was the running costs. Compared with our diesel Defender, we saved $200-$220 a week based on an average weekly routine for our family. Over a year, that's close to $10,000 before even factoring in family holidays or the bigger savings if we were to plug in and charge at home. Then you have the obvious additional cost savings in terms of maintenance as an EV only requires servicing every two years whereas a standard vehicle is usually every six to 12 months. An EV has fewer than 20 moving parts, compared to upwards of 2000 in a standard combustion engine.

For anyone still confused by the jargon, here's a breakdown: a full EV runs entirely on electricity and is charged by plugging it in. A hybrid combines petrol with an electric motor and generally charges itself while driving. A plug-in hybrid provides the flexibility of both.

Would I do it again?

If you're curious but not ready to buy, hiring an EV is the perfect way to try one. Rental companies across Australia now offer plenty of electric options, allowing families to experience EV road-tripping before making the leap. After spending several weeks using one both around home and on family escapes to the Great Ocean Road, Gippsland and the Macedon Ranges, I came home wondering why I'd waited so long to give EVs a chance. Once you get the hang of it, it becomes easy, effortless and a heck of a lot of fun! Not to mention I found it hard saying goodbye to the slick interior of the EV.

Would I take one deep into the Australian outback tomorrow? Probably not yet. But for family holidays along Australia's coastlines, regional towns and well-travelled highways? Absolutely. ●

01 Away we go 02 Daisy, Jasper and four-legged friend Captain enjoying an EV road trip 03 On the road. Images © Meg Law